

FAMILIAR LETTERS,

ADDRESSED TO

THE INHABITANTS OF BIRMINGHAM,

IN

REFUTATION OF SEVERAL CHARGES,

ADVANCED AGAINST

The Dissenters and Unitarians.

BY THE REV. MR. MADAN.

ALSO,

LETTERS TO THE REV. EDWARD BURN,

In Answer to HIS on the Infallibility of the Apostolic
Testimony concerning the Person of Christ.

AND

*Considerations on the Differences of Opinion among
Christians, which originally accompanied the Reply
to the Rev. Mr. Venn.*

THE SECOND EDITION, WITH SOME ADDITIONS
AND CORRECTIONS.

BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L.L.D. F.R.S.

To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all
meekness unto all men. TITUS iii. 2.

MR. MADAN'S TEXT.

Ne savi Magne sacerdos. VIRGIL.

BIRMINGHAM,

PRINTED BY J. THOMPSON;

AND SOLD BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, LONDON.

MDCCXC.

~~C1329.37~~



1865, April 24

Gift of
the Family of the
late William Wells
of Cambridge.
(Ms. B. 1. 7. 96.)

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THE PREFACE.

BOTH the writing of these *Familiar Letters*, and the demand that has been for them, were equally unexpected by me. I should certainly have contented myself with the publication of my *Sermon on the Corporation and Test Acts*, if I had not been called forth to say something more by the injurious representation that was given of the Dissenters in general, with manifest allusions to myself in particular, by Mr. Madan, a clergyman highly and justly respected in the place where I live.

Also, as his reflections were not confined to the subject of the above mentioned Acts, there was an evident call upon me to give *light* on those other subjects on which he appeared to me to have thrown *darkness*. I therefore thought it highly proper to correct the views that he had given of the principles of the Dissenters, and especially of the *Unitarians*, and also to shew my neighbours the real constitution of that *church* of which he was so strenuous an advocate. If the principles of the Dissenters, and of the Unitarians, appear to advantage on the comparison, it is an advantage which they derive from *truth*, and the occasion of giving it was not sought for by myself.

Though these Letters were never advertised in any London Newspaper, they have, by some means or other, been more generally known, and read, than most of my publications. In consequence of this, besides a republication of all the separate *Parts* (five in all) of which they originally consisted, I have now thought proper to republish the whole in an uniform manner, with a few additions and corrections.

The demand for the *Letters to Mr. Burn*, occasioned by *his* to me, has been nearly equal to that

for the *Familiar Letters*; especially on account of *Extracts from the Preface* having been printed separately, and sent from this place to every member of the House of Commons, and to all the bishops, immediately before the late debate on the subject of the Corporation and Test Acts. Highly unfair and shameful as that proceeding was, it is even applauded by Mr. Madan in his *Letter to me*; so blind can party spirit make men to the true colour of their own conduct, and that of their friends. These *Letters to Mr. Burn* being, in several respects, similar to the *Familiar Letters*, and the subject being resumed in them, it has been thought adviseable to reprint them together, rather than separately. It must be remembered, however, that the publication of them preceded that of the *Familiar Letters*.

Though this is properly a *local controversy*, yet on this republication, for more general use, it has been thought proper to retain most of the local circumstances; partly because it would not have been easy to separate them from the rest, and also because they tend to interest the reader in the discussion; and the *names* only being changed, the *descriptions* will equally suit other persons, and other places. The circumstances relating to the Dissenters at Birmingham are by no means peculiar to this place; and such clergymen as Mr. Madan, and Mr. Burn, are to be found in many places. Bigotry and prejudice abound too much even in this enlightened age, and affect many characters in other respects truly valuable. With these considerations, which candour and justice require, the observations in these Letters will be of as much use in one part of the kingdom as in another.

It is to be wished, however, that the friends of religious liberty and free inquiry, would take advantage

vantage of all local circumstances, to draw the attention of their particular neighbours to important subjects. For where writers and their connections are known, more persons will read, and of course will be impressed, by their publications, than where they are altogether unknown. A pamphlet, or a sermon, that deserves no notice with respect to its general argument, and the knowledge of which will never reach the nation at large, may with great propriety be answered in the place, or neighbourhood, in which it was published. Thus may a whole country be instructed by parts, in a number of local publications, when no one treatise, though ever so ably written, would sufficiently engage the attention of all. Besides, there are prejudices against some men, and their writings, which do not affect others. What I have done at Birmingham, may be considered as a specimen of what I wish to see done by other persons in other places.

To what I have written on the subject of *subscription*, I would add that, judging by appearances, the clergy are now made to subscribe to what it is impossible that many of them can be acquainted with, and what, I will venture to say, they would all condemn if they were.

In the thirty sixth Article, they are made to assert that “ the book of consecration of the arch-
“ bishops, &c. lately set forth in the time of Edward the VI. doth contain all things necessary to
“ such consecration and ordering; neither hath it
“ any thing that of itself is superstitious and ungodly.
“ And therefore whosoever are consecrated, or
“ ordered, according to the rites of that book
“ since the second year of the forenamed king Edward unto this time, or hereafter shall be consecrated, and ordered, according to the same rites,
“ we

“we decree all such to be rightly, orderly, and lawfully, consecrated and ordered.”

It should seem, therefore, that it was the *first edition* of this book, printed A. D. 1549, that is even *now* asserted to contain nothing *superstitious*; and it is said that no copy of this edition is to be found in the libraries of Oxford or Cambridge, or in the British Museum. But by favour of the Rev. Mr. Josiah Thompson, whose property it is, I have one now in my possession, as it was formerly in that of Dr. Furneaux, who gave an account of it in the second edition of his *Letters to Dr. Blackstone*, Note, p. 89, &c.

In this book the oath of supremacy, to be taken by the person ordained, contains a solemn promise, to observe all the Acts of Parliament that were then made, or *to be made*, “in derogation of the authority of the bishop of Rome, and in corroboration of the king’s power, as head of the church;” concluding with “*so helpe me God, all saintes, and the holy Evangelist.*” See p. 8, 9.*.

If, therefore, *this* be the edition approved of by the thirty sixth Article, the clergy who subscribe it do, in fact, declare their approbation of any Acts of Parliament that may ever be made on the subjects above specified; and, that there is nothing *superstitious* in swearing by the saints, and the holy evangelist, which ever of the four was meant.†

* At the end of this edition is,

RICHARDUS GRAFTON
typographus Regis excudebat
Mense Martij
A. M. D, XLIX.

Cum privilegio ad imprimendum solum.

† This is probably a misprint for *evangelists*. The form of an oath in the *Roman Pontifical*, published at Venice, in 1710, is *Sic me Deus adjuvet, et hæc sancta Dei evangelia. So help me God, and these his holy gospels.* p. 55, and other places. I have not observed in it any swearing by the saints.

It is true that the *Act of Uniformity* enacts, that
 “all subscriptions to this Article shall be construed
 “to extend to the book of Charles II. in such sort
 “and manner as the same heretofore extended to
 “the book of Edward VI.” But if the approba-
 tion of *both* the books was not intended, why does
 the Article, as now subscribed, make any mention
 of the book of Edward VI? If the subscription
 does not extend to *this* also, why is it not struck
 out, and that of Charles II. put in its place?

It appears, however, from *Bishop Burnet's History of the Reformation*, Vol. II. p. 189, that an act of parliament was made in 1552, to authorize a *new Common Prayer Book*, according to some alterations that had been agreed on the year before, and to this was annexed *the form of making bishops, priests, and deacons*, but without the intimation of any alteration being then made in this office. If these objectionable passages were then left out, it will not be so evident that every thing in the former edition is now to be approved, though persons consecrated according to it be declared to be rightly consecrated. It certainly behoves all who subscribe the thirty-nine articles to inform themselves how the case really stands.

How dangerous and ensnaring a thing is this business of subscription, and how little care has been taken by the legislature to prevent even *uncertainty* with respect to it. I mention this circumstance in order to apprise those who have subscribed, but especially those who intend to subscribe, of their situation; that they may satisfy themselves what it is that their subscription really implies. I mean those who wish to subscribe *bona fide*, and not with any of the fourteen miserable subterfuges which I have enumerated at the close of my *Defences of Unitarianism for the Years 1788 and 1789*, which imply no belief

belief in any of the articles. To such it must be a matter of perfect indifference what is implied in any of them. They are ready, for the same emolument, to subscribe *any thing*, even *unseen*. For what signifies *seeing*, or *reading* the articles, if, after all, they are *to be subscribed* without being believed?

Many persons into whose hands these *Letters* may fall, especially at some distance of time, will hardly be able to understand what is said in them of my comparison of the progress of *free enquiry*, to the action of *gunpowder*; and it makes me smile to think there should be any occasion to explain it. It may be of use, however, to shew how ready some people are to cavil at the most innocent things, when they have a previous, though ill-grounded, suspicion of a man's intentions. The almost incredible number of times that this simple comparison has been quoted, or alluded to, by the enemies of the Dissenters, shews also how *tremblingly alive* they are to the apprehension of danger to their system, and gives me an idea that I own I had not before, of the weakness of it. To us this affords no unpleasant prospect, and it may tempt us to sport with their fears on other occasions.

To my *Sermon on Free Enquiry*, preached Nov. 5, 1785, I added some *Reflections on the present State of it in this Country*, and in them may be seen the following unfortunate paragraph, which, when I read to a friend before it went to the press, he prophetically told me would make much noise; but I believed him not.

“ Let us not therefore be discouraged, though,
 “ for the present, we see no great number of
 “ churches professedly unitarian. It is sufficiently
 “ evident that unitarian principles are gaining
 “ ground

“ ground every day. Every attempt to suppress
 “ them, by writing or otherwise, has hitherto been
 “ favourable to their spread, and we may be confident it ever will be so. We are now sowing
 “ the seeds, which the cold of winter may prevent
 “ from sprouting, but which a genial spring will
 “ make to shoot and spring up; so that the field
 “ which to day appears perfectly naked and barren,
 “ may to-morrow be all green, and promise an
 “ abundant harvest. The present silent propagation
 “ of truth may even be compared to those causes in
 “ nature which lie dormant for a time, but which,
 “ in proper circumstances, act with the greatest
 “ violence. We are, as it were, laying gunpowder,
 “ grain by grain, under the old building of error
 “ and superstition, which a single spark may here-
 “ after inflame, so as to produce an instantaneous
 “ explosion; in consequence of which that edifice,
 “ the erection of which has been the work of ages,
 “ may be overturned in a moment, and so effectually,
 “ as that the same foundation can never be
 “ built upon again.” *Discourses*, p. 184.

Let the reader now judge whether any thing violent was intended, or in the most distant manner alluded to by me; and yet this very paragraph did I hear Sir William Dolben (prompted, no doubt, by some of those bishops, whose fears our magnanimous prime minister acknowledged that *he* also had caught) read with great solemnity in the house of Commons, as an unquestionable proof of the dangerous designs of the Dissenters with respect to the constitution of this country. *Risum teneatis*—

In addition to my vindication from the malicious defamation of the author of *Theodosius*, furnished me by the narrative of Dr. Bancroft, it is now in my

my power to add the following testimony voluntarily offered to me by Mr. Dexter, a Baptist minister, who was on board with Mr. Deane when he died. It will appear as follows in the next Gentleman's Magazine.

'MR. URBAN,

Canterbury, July 18.

' Seeing the extract from *Theodosius* in your Magazine for May last, relative to the death-bed conversation of Silas Deane, I have to observe, that, on the 22d of September last, about nine o'clock in the morning, Silas Deane came on board the Boston packet, with the captain, the ship lying off Gravesend, which sailed immediately. In about an hour's time, Silas Deane was taken ill, and in a few minutes quite speechless, and continued so near four hours, and then died. I was the only cabin-passenger *then* on board, and the only person perfectly at liberty to attend Silas Deane, and was much with him from the time of his going on board till his death. I am confident no such clergyman as mentioned by Theodosius was with Silas Deane during his illness, and that the relation of Theodosius is a palpable imposition on the publick. Yours, &c.

' MATTHEW DEXTER.'

In my Letter relating to this subject I intimated a suspicion that the author of *Theodosius* was "a clergyman of the church of England, who formerly wrote me a confidential letter." Lest any person should suffer unjustly in consequence of this hint, I shall now say that I meant DR. WITHERS, who lately died in Newgate. I am of opinion that he was the writer, because the author of *Alfred* and *Cassandra* was not incapable of it, and the hand writing of the Note I received signed *Theodosius*, sufficiently

ufficiently resembles that of the letter I had from Dr. Withers.

As this letter cannot now do him any injury (which I was apprehensive it might have done while he was alive, and for that reason forbore to publish it) as it is a curiosity in itself, and as the spirit and manner of its composition will be an additional evidence of its having the same author with *Theodosius*, I shall subjoin it. That the *sentiments* of this letter and those of Theodosius are different will not be thought an unanswerable objection to their having the same author. I have no note of the answer I returned; but I believe it was such as did not encourage a continuance of the correspondence. Whether that circumstance contributed to his change of conduct with respect to me, I leave others to conjecture. If the author of Theodosius was not Dr. Withers, and he have any remains of *moral principle*, he will avow himself, and save the memory of the dead. To myself it is a matter of perfect indifference who he is.

‘ SIR,

‘ Tho’ a perfect Stranger to your *Person*,
‘ I offer no Apology for addressing you on a Subject so interesting to the Rights of Mankind.

‘ I am by Birth and Profession a *Churchman*; but
‘ when civil and religious Freedom are in Question,
‘ I drop all Distinctions of Sect and Party. And,
‘ without Reserve, I declare that we—we Protestants—
‘ we Protestant Dissenters, have too long
‘ degraded ourselves by abject unavailing Entreaties.
‘ Vile Indignity, that Men, that Englishmen should
‘ solicit Permission to enjoy the first Privileges of
‘ human Life! Should be denied Access to every
‘ Office of Honor and Emolument, unless they previously

‘viciously insult their Reason and wound their Con-
 ‘science! Should be menaced with a Dungeon, if
 ‘they presume to utter their native Conceptions of
 ‘the Deity!

‘But if Dissenters will be faithful to themselves,
 ‘will form a Committee to defray the necessary
 ‘Expences, and will act with a Dignity and Reso-
 ‘lution suitable to the great Occasion, I promise to
 ‘emancipate them from their cruel captivity. And
 ‘here I must inform you (in the fullest Confidence
 ‘of perpetual Secrecy) that I am the Author of a
 ‘Pamphlet, entitled CASSANDRA.* Its Object was
 ‘to carry Mr. Bastard’s ecclesiastical Bill thro’ the
 ‘upper House—it succeeded; I wrote it without
 ‘the Aid or Concurrence of any Man living, and at
 ‘the Hazard of Prosecution. I sent a Copy to the
 ‘Bishop of London, and one to Lord Thurlow, so-
 ‘lemnly declaring, if they threw out the Bill, I would
 ‘instantly exhibit Articles against the Chancellor for
 ‘Fornication, at the same Time intimating what I
 ‘should expect on the next Application to Parlia-
 ‘ment†, concerning the Test, and other absurd and
 ‘oppressive Acts of Power. Now mark what God
 ‘does, in his own Time, and in his own Way; how
 ‘he uses the Simple to confound the Wise, and with
 ‘the Foot of a leprous Man puts the Syrian Armies
 ‘to Flight—that VERY BILL, which the Chan-
 ‘cellor and the Bishops had lately treated with Con-
 ‘tempt, as ridiculous, unscriptural, and totally unne-
 ‘cessary, was now suffered to pass without the
 ‘slightest Censure!!! In Fact, such is the Situa-
 ‘tion of Lord Thurlow and some other leading
 ‘Men, that we may do what we please. They are
 ‘obviously destitute of those noble, liberal, and

‘* Published by Ridgway, Piccadilly. I would send you a Copy if I
 ‘knew the Conveyance. Shall I leave one at Johnson’s?’

‘† Mr. Beaufoy’s Motion was lost before I came from the Press.’

‘enlightened

‘enlightened Sentiments, which characterize great
 ‘and good Minds. But if the Chancellor will not
 ‘grant Freedom to others, neither shall he enjoy it
 ‘himself.

‘In Cassandra you will read my Heart. We dif-
 ‘fer in many Points, and we will agree to differ.
 ‘As to Christ, I depart from you *toto Cælo*. In
 ‘civil and religious Liberty, I am confident we have
 ‘but one Wish.

‘As the Mode of swearing in Courts*, and the
 ‘Marriage of Dissenters, by their own Pastors, form
 ‘a Part of my Plan, the Scotch Seceders will be
 ‘strenuous in the Cause. Our Measures, at pre-
 ‘sent, ought to be secret. I shall be happy to be
 ‘favoured with your Thoughts on the Business, as
 ‘early as possible. Meanwhile, I remain

‘Dr Sir, Your obed. Serv^t.

‘(Address)
 ‘Dr. Withers, Sloan-Square,
 ‘Chelsea.’

‘PHILIP WITHERS.’

‘* A Bill to this Effect had passed both Houses, when the former Par-
 ‘liament was dissolved.’

N. B. The Letter is without a date, but the *Post*
Mark is August 4, 1787.

I shall take this opportunity of informing my
 readers, that in the late controversy concerning the
Test Act, I wrote nothing anonymously except
Remarks on two Letters addressed to the Delegates of
the several Congregations who met at Devizes, Septem-
ber 14, 1789, which is subjoined to another piece,
 written by a different and very able hand, entitled
The Spirit of the Constitution and that of the Church
of England compared. I also wrote the *Preface*.
 This *Pamphlet*, and my *Sermon* on the same subject,
 may be properly bound with these *Letters*.

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In this Interval Mr. Burn published his *second set of Letters to me*. In the same short space of time, a great part of which I spent in London, no less than *eight* other publications relating to this controversy appeared in Birmingham : so much attention was there given to it.

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FAMILIAR LETTERS, &c.

LETTER I.

*Of the seditious Tendency ascribed by Mr. Madan to the late
Public Meetings of the Dissenters.*

My generous Townsmen and Neighbours,

HAVING lived very happily near ten years in this part of the country, and being desirous to acquire, and preserve, your good opinion, I take the liberty to address you on a subject to which your attention has of late been very frequently called, viz. the application to parliament for the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts*, and also on various other subjects relating to the *Dissenters*, and the *established Church*, especially by the justly respected rector of St. Philip's, in his *Sermon*, intitled, *The principal Claims of the Dissenters considered*, in which he has advanced many things tending to give you a very unfavourable opinion of the Dissenters in general, and, not very obliquely, of myself in particular.

Mr. Madan's excellent character will lead you to give him entire credit for whatever he shall think proper to declare, especially from so sacred a place as the *pulpit*. For you will naturally conclude, that, speaking with such solemnity, he must have carefully considered what he asserted; and his sincerity would not have been called in question, even if he had not thought necessary to declare, p. 6, that what he delivered were the *settled principles and conviction of his heart, as he hoped for mercy from the God of truth.*

B

This

This is such a solemn form of an oath, or an appeal to God for his sincerity, as is not very common, and such as is never used except in cases in which a man supposes that there may be some cause to suspect his veracity; and how Mr. Madan should conceive that this could be *his* case I cannot imagine. Recourse should not be had to such peculiarly solemn forms of *asseveration* without *necessity*, because it tends to make them too common, by which means they come at length to lose their effect.

Besides, I cannot help wishing that the preacher had kept up to the spirit of his text a little better than he has done. This advises us to *speakevill of no man, to be gentle, and to shew meekness towards all men*. But how is this consistent with his imputing to a numerous sect of his fellow-citizens (with many of whom he must have had, I doubt not, a pleasing and useful intercourse) some of the very worst and most dangerous designs, for which he can have no evidence besides his own surmises. He calls the late proceedings of the Dissenters to procure the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, p. 4, *clamorous and violent*; and he intimates that our *final views* are of a *sedition tendency*. What favourable inference, says he, p. 27, "can be drawn from the "alarm which their leaders are sounding through every part "of Great Britain about their *common cause*; how are we "to understand their voluntary contributions for national "meetings, and for *other public uses*," directing your particular attention, as you see, to the last words, as being of a more suspicious nature, by printing them in *italics*.

Certainly, my good friends, the preacher, in bringing these *railing accusations*, has quite lost sight of his text—This is *speaking evil*. It is not being very *gentle*, or *showing much meekness*. But I account for it by his imagination being strangely disturbed with groundless terrors, on account of the interest that he and his friends have in the system for which he is so very apprehensive; so that he *fears where no fear is*, and where no other man, except one in a similar situation, can see any cause of fear at all. But perceiving

ceiving how much he is agitated on the subject, I should not wonder if he suspected an enemy to be concealed in every bush, or to see him start at his own shadow.

For do but consider the thing coolly, and see what our proceedings have actually been. Have they not been the very same that, without any censure, have been again and again adopted by the most peaceable classes of people in the country, manufacturers for instance like yourselves, who have no other wish than *quietly to follow their own business*, whenever they have imagined themselves to be aggrieved by any particular law, or measure of government? Have they not held their *meetings* by public advertisement? Have there not been many of them in this very town, many in London, and other places, to consider of proper measures to obtain redress, to solicit parliament, &c. and when these meetings are, as indeed they necessarily must be, attended with *expence*, must not *funds* be established to defray those expences? Have not these things been done a thousand times in this country, without any body ever imagining that there was any thing *seditionous*, or *hostile to government* in them? Now candour would suppose that we Dissenters, like other bodies of men who have held similar public meetings, have had no farther view than to relieve ourselves in a legal way from what we consider as *hardships*.

By printing the words *other public uses* in italics, Mr. Madan certainly meant to insinuate that, besides what we *express*, we had some farther *concealed* and *dangerous views*; as if there were not many *public uses* of a very innocent nature, for which *money* was necessary, besides merely defraying the expence of public meetings. You see that we print and publish many pamphlets, as well as insert the Resolutions of our meetings in the public papers, in order to give our countrymen the information which we see they want concerning our situation, and the reasons for our application to parliament. This business also requires a very extensive *correspondence*, which is necessarily attended with expence.

Now, might not Mr. Madan's imagination, if it had not been of a very suspicious turn indeed, have led him to suppose that by *other public uses* were meant such expences as *these*, and others equally necessary, but not deserving to be particularly specified in a printed resolution? What a strange suspicious turn must that man's mind have who could imagine that under such an innocent expression, any *dark designs* were concealed; as if we were ready to take arms in order to overturn the government. He must be a mere Don Quixote who can believe any such thing, and worse than a Quixote who could insinuate it without believing it. But as Mr. Madan solemnly declares that he speaks from the *settled principles and conviction of his heart, as he hopes for mercy from the God of truth*, I am willing to think, that strange as this notion is, and bordering even upon insanity, it has actually got possession of his mind. For can it be supposed that a minister of the gospel of peace, in the perfect use of his reason, could, on such a trifling ground as this, endeavour to raise your indignation against persons with whom you have lived in good neighbourhood from your infancy, and whom you know to be as well affected to government, and as peaceably disposed, as himself?

Whatever the Dissenters be with respect to their *religious principles*, which concern only God and ourselves, you see that we are not absolutely *mad*; and *that* we must be to think of overturning a government so well established as that of this country, even if we were not friends to it. But the Dissenters have given clearer proofs of their value for it, and especially of their attachment to the reigning family, than the generality of the clergy, whose loyalty, though they now make so great a parade of it, is well known to be of very late date; whereas ours was always zealous and active from the first accession of the present reigning family, as the most authentic documents testify.

As to our *public meetings*, which have given such umbrage to Mr. Madan, have not the Quakers always been in the habit

habit of doing the very thing that he considers as of so seditious a tendency in *us*? Have not they their *district meetings* every month, and their *national meetings* in London every year; and have they not a common *fund* to defray the expences attending them, and for *other purposes* also not particularly specified? As to what we do in our *district meetings* (for as yet we have not held any *national* one) are not our *Resolutions* made public? You see them in all the newspapers, so that you may read, and examine them yourselves, and see whether they contain any thing of a seditious nature. It is for your information, and judgment of them, that we are at so much expence to make them public. Our wish is to give you information, to lay our case clearly before you, to invite the accusations of our adversaries, and to make you our judges.

Mr. Madan could not write as he has done, without suspecting that, besides our *printed Resolutions*, we have *others* which we do not publish, like the *secret articles* in public treaties between states and sovereigns. But so very heterogeneous a body as the Dissenters are, agreeing in nothing but a desire of *equal liberty*, could not well have, or keep, *secrets*. Mr. Madan himself says, p. 27, that “we betray our final views indiscreetly.” And truly, if we were not honest men, we are very indiscreet indeed. You never heard of rogues and traitors going to work as we do. If they did, they would have very little chance of succeeding in such designs as Mr. Madan imputes to us.

You have been told in a variety of publications, that I have threatened to blow up the church, if not the state also, with *gunpowder*, and Mr. Madan (who, if the church be blown up, must take his fate along with it) has insinuated p. 26, that *I* in particular have dangerous views. Now, my good friends and neighbours, I am not actually a madman. You know too much of me to believe *this*. You see me walk about the streets very composedly, without molesting any body, and always behaving civilly to those who behave civilly to me, and therefore I hope you will

not think I have any such diabolical intention. In fact, all the gunpowder that I manufacture is contained in such pamphlets as this that you are now reading ; and though it may serve for wadding to a gun, it can do nothing else towards shooting birds, or killing men. My gunpowder is nothing but *arguments*, which can have no force but what you yourselves shall be pleased to give them, from your own conviction of the reasonableness of what I lay before you.

Like all people, who think themselves in the right, I wish, no doubt, to bring others to think as I do on every subject of importance. But the pains I take in this way is for *your* own good, and not for *mine* ; and though I should be ever so much mistaken, my intention is friendly, and no harm can arise from it. If the conduct of your clergy be justifiable, and even commendable, as I acknowledge it to be, in endeavouring to bring Dissenters into the church, provided they make use of no other means than *arguments*, it cannot be wrong in me to endeavour by other arguments to bring you from it. We equally mean to conduct you to heaven in the way of truth, and the practice of virtue. After all, you hear us both, and judge for yourselves ; and we have no reason to expect that you will go one way or the other till you think you have good reason for so doing. What then is it that your clergy would frighten you with ?

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER II.

Proofs from History and recent Facts, that neither the Dissenters in general, nor the Presbyterians in particular, have been such Enemies to Monarchy, as Mr. Madan has represented.

My good Friends and Neighbours,

MR. Madan is pleased to say, p. 13, "Is there no reason
"to see with suspicion their declarations of reverence
"to the government, and of loyalty to the king, however
"speciously and pompously announced, when the amount
"of that reverence has been exactly ascertained by a woful
"experience of republican tyranny, and the extent of that
"loyalty has been exactly delineated with the blood of a
"king."

In his extraordinary paragraph, Mr. Madan, with what views are best known to himself, confounds the case of the present king George III. with that of Charles I. as if they were kings of similar characters, and governed by similar maxims, so that whoever could take it into their heads to rise against the one, and dethrone him, would do the same by the other if they could. He too plainly insinuates that all Dissenters, at least such as met at Leicester, whose Resolutions he quotes, and which are similar to those that have been adopted in all other meetings (so that, in fact, he must mean to comprehend the great body of them in his censure) are in their hearts haters of *kings in general*, and of the present king in particular, that they would certainly murder them all without distinction, if they had opportunity; and that all our declarations to the contrary are not to be regarded.

Now, not to say that our declarations of reverence for the present government, and of loyalty to the present king, are no more liable to suspicion than his own declarations, that what he tells you to our prejudice (leading you to

consider us as a band of traitors and rebels) is from his *settled principles and the conviction of his heart, as he hopes for mercy from the God of truth* (which mercy, if he sincerely repent, I doubt not he will obtain) let us consider what *reason* he can have for this injurious accusation of us, as *king-haters*, and *king-murderers*. Let us see if we can trace where he got these *settled principles and conviction of his heart*, though I fear we shall not easily find it. It must be from some very obscure quarter indeed, inaccessible to all mankind, and of which I suspect he will not be able to give any clear account himself. It is certain that the notions he has taken up concerning the death of Charles I. admitting that the present Dissenters, at the distance of near a century and a half from the time of that transaction, were all the lineal descendants of those who put him to death (inheriting their estates, names, and characters, and considering all kings, and the present king, in the same light as they did *him*) were not taken from any *history of England* that is now extant, at least any that I have ever seen, or heard of. But when he is called upon, he will perhaps be pleased to produce it.

The history that I should have thought to be most to his purpose is that of *Clarendon*, of what he calls *the grand rebellion*. But even there he will see that the parliament, which began the war with the king, was not a presbyterian one. It was called, though reluctantly, by the king himself, and the members were chosen by the nation at large, and as freely as any members of parliament ever were; and if the necessary consequence of that war was the death of the king (since *causa causæ est causa causati*) they are *Episcopalians*, and not *Presbyterians*, to whom the death of this *blessed martyr* is to be ultimately ascribed. But to *what* was he a martyr, but to his own tyranny and duplicity? He would have governed in an arbitrary manner, without any parliament, and actually raised taxes by his own authority; and for this it was that an episcopalian parliament (for the majority of the members were such) declared war against him. And would not such measures as these justify resistance to any king? Is there nothing *sacred* in the *rights of the people*;

people; and are they to be wantonly trampled upon by any person, merely because he is called *a king*? And if in such a cause a king make war upon his subjects, and occasion the death of thousands of them, is his single life of so much value, as that he ought to be spared for such an enormity? But without considering the *justice* of this measure, let us see in what manner this tragical event came to pass, and we shall find that, according to all historians, it is not to be attributed to the *Presbyterians*, who were by far the majority of those who dissented from the church of England at that time.

It is somewhat remarkable that the parliament which took up arms against Charles I. though originally Episcopalians, became in general Presbyterians. But this must have been the effect of their own *conviction*, and not of any *compulsion*. Presbyterians, however, as they were, it is well known that the members of this parliament continued to the last well wishers to the king, and he was not put to death till by an armed force they were overpowered. This armed force was headed by Independents, and against the wishes and earnest remonstrances of the Presbyterians, now upon record, they beheaded the king. After that event, the Presbyterians were the most active in bringing in his successor Charles II. and without their concurrence he could not have been brought in at all.

So much was Mr. Love, and some other zealous Presbyterians, suspected of favouring the king, that Oliver Cromwell thought it necessary to put him and one Gibbons to death before his expedition to Scotland. He protested that he would not march till they were cut off. See *An Historical Essay on the Loyalty of Presbyterians in Great Britain and Ireland from the Reformation to the Year, 1713.* 4to. p. 304.

Though the *Independents* who killed the king, might be called *Dissenters*, as well as the *Presbyterians*, who remonstrated against that measure, they were but a small minority of them; and therefore, on the supposition that the present
race

race of Dissenters are descended alike from *both*, and we were responsible for the conduct of our ancestors, it ought not to be imputed to us as a *body*, but only to a *small part* of us. Besides, the Independents of *that* day did not behead the king from any principles peculiar to their *religious persuasion*. Cromwell, and the rest who joined him in that action, would have cut off the king, whatever had been *their* religion or *his*. They consulted not their *religion*, but their *safety* and their *ambition*. And in all these measures the Independents were joined by the *Deists*, and men of no religion at all. It can therefore only answer the purposes of *faction* and of *bigotry*, and by no means that of *truth*, to accuse the *Dissenters* of putting king Charles to death. Had it been considered as an action highly *meritorious*, I doubt not, our pretensions to it would be far enough from being admitted.

If you read any history of England whatever, you will find this to be the truth of the case, though the very reverse is more than insinuated by Mr. Madan, and he may have authorities unknown to all the world besides. But then he ought not to assert what he has done without producing them. Without this he has no right to expect that the *settled principles and conviction of HIS heart should become those of YOURS*.

Mr. Madan, however, having got his historical and political principles from some source or other, is pleased to assert, p. 8, as a general maxim, that "the presbyterian principles are unquestionably republican." As he calls it *unquestionable*, I imagine he has never questioned it himself, or made any inquiry into the foundation of it; but as you are not bound to adopt his principles without *questioning*, or *examination*, let us see how they accord both with the history of *former times*, and with the *present state of things*, which Mr. Madan, though he may shut his own eyes, cannot conceal from you.

At the time of the *civil wars*, or, as Mr. Madan will say, during the *grand rebellion*, the Scots were unquestionably Presbyterians,

Presbyterians, if ever there were any such people in the world. But though they joined the English till the king was effectually subdued, they remonstrated against putting him to death; and when, after this, England was governed by a republic, the Scotch Presbyterians, whose principles Mr. Madan says were *unquestionably republican*, were so attached to *monarchy*, that they not only received Charles II. and made him *their king*, but, in order to assist him in recovering what they deemed to be his *right*, they marched an army into England, but were defeated at Worcester, as every person who has read the history of England well knows. Where then, is the evidence *from history* of the principles of Presbyterians being *unquestionably republican*? Mr. Madan, however, asserts this to be the *settled conviction of his heart*, and therefore he must either have read some other histories of England, or none at all.

Let us now see whether it appears from the *present state of things*, that the principles of Presbyterians be, as Mr. Madan asserts, *unquestionably republican*; and for this purpose let us look towards Scotland; and whether Mr. Madan be acquainted with the fact or not, it is well known to others, that *presbyterianism* is as much the established religion of *that country*, as *episcopacy* is of *this*. Now, are the Scots at all supposed to be inclined to republicanism, or have they ever been accused, even in the greatest violence of party, of disaffection to the present government, or of any want of attachment to the present royal family? On the contrary, the only people disaffected to government in Scotland, those who joined the Pretender in that country were *Episcopals*, and very few of them *Presbyterians**.

* A few, but not many, Scotch Presbyterians, men of desperate fortunes, joined the late Pretender. Of the English Dissenters, I believe, there was not one that took his part. In the first rebellion Mr. Wood, the dissenting minister at Chowbent in Lancashire, took the field himself at the head of his congregation. In the second the members of my former congregation at Leeds were regularly exercised, and prepared to march. One of my uncles, who had been a captain in the army, was an officer. When the rebellions were suppressed, these friends

If Mr. Madan's maxim be true, that *the principles of Presbyterians are unquestionably republican*, no nation of Presbyterians would ever have had a *king*, except one that was forced upon them. But the Scots always had kings, and as much *of their own choice*, as we in England. In all the civil wars, during the time of Mary Queen of Scots, it does not appear that they ever thought of abandoning monarchical government, and erecting a republic. While Mary was a prisoner in England, they made her son their king. That king became afterwards king of England, and they have been the descendants of this *presbyterian king*, who have reigned in this episcopalian country, from that time to the present day.

Let us now consider a little the conduct of the Scotch lords and commons since the union of the two nations. Are they more hostile to monarchy, and the measures of government, than the English members of parliament? The contrary is generally supposed. For though many English lords and commoners oppose the measures of government, there is hardly an example of any Scotchman, either lord or commoner, ever doing it. And yet Mr. Madan, ignorant, I suppose, of all this, will have it that the *principles of Presbyterians are unquestionably republican*.

Mr. Madan will perhaps say that he meant the Presbyterians in *England*, exclusive of those in *Scotland*. But originally they were the very same; and till long after the time of Charles I. in which he charges them with maintaining republican principles, there was no difference whatever between them; and whatever Mr. Madan may think, the

friends of the family upon the throne (*unquestionably Republicans*, as Mr. Madan, who was not then born, says they were) were graciously *pardoned* for what they had done.

In case of a third rebellion, I myself would undertake to raise a company of young men in my present congregation, able and willing to defend his present majesty, though he might not be so ready to pardon us for so doing. It is not the *man*, but the *king*, and the present reigning family, as an essential part of the constitution, for which we should fight.

English

English Presbyterians at this day are no more attached to a republican government than those of former times, or those in Scotland; and I challenge him to produce any evidence of his confident assertion. That single speculative men, Presbyterians or others, may give the preference to that mode of government *in theory*, is not the question. Mr. Hume evidently had a predilection for it; but was he therefore discontented with this government, or in the least disaffected to it? There never was a more obedient subject. But the Dissenters, as a body, have never shewn any preference of a republican government; though it is easy to assert *this*, or any thing else, in order to throw an odium on those whom we wish to render generally obnoxious.

In fact, Mr. Madan might with as much truth say, that all Presbyterians are *Negroes**, and that we paint our faces and hands, in order to conceal it, as maintain that we are *republicans*. Let him, or, since *he* will not, do *you*, read my own writings of a political nature, viz. my *Essay on the first Principles of Government*, or Dr. Price's *Essay on Civil Liberty*, which are generally considered as the boldest, and the most exceptionable, of any thing on the subject in the English language; or look into my *Lectures on History and General Policy*, in which I particularly consider all the forms of government, and weigh their advantages and defects, and see whether you can discover any traces of a preference for republican government. On the contrary, you will

* In the famous contested election at Bristol between the late Lord Nugent (as he afterwards became) and Mr. Beckford, his Lordship told me that he gained his point with the populace, by his friends asserting that Mr. Beckford (who had an estate in Jamaica, and, as I remember, was at that time there) was a *Negro*, and the popular cry on his Lordship's side was "*No Negro; no woollen hair.*" They had even (as I think he added) a painted figure of a Negro with such hair carried about the streets. When I asked him how his friends could assert such absurd falsehoods, he replied that all was fair at an election. Mr. Madan may perhaps think it equally fair in the present *contest*, to call the Dissenters republicans, but then he should not have declared that what he asserted was from the *settled principles and conviction of his heart*, as he hoped for mercy from the God of truth. This was much farther than Lord Nugent went.

there find a decided preference given to our own, and perhaps as good reasons for this preference as Mr. Madan himself is able to give. What then must you think of such *calumny* as he, in this random inconsiderate manner, and yet with such uncommon solemnity, has thrown out.

The truth is, that we Dissenters are friends to a *limited monarchy*, in which a king may do much good, and can do but little harm, whereas the clergy in general have always had a leaning to a more *arbitrary form of government*, in which the king shall have much to give, and themselves as much to receive. Hence their deep rooted attachment to the family of the *Stuarts*, and *ours* to that of *Hanover*. It is well known that the clergy in general were never well affected to what is usually called *government*, but generally opposed the *measures of the court*, in the reigns of king William, and those of George I. and George II. while the Dissenters, out of gratitude for the liberty they enjoyed under them, went perhaps too eagerly with the court, and abetted with too little distinction the measures of government.

Now it has unfortunately happened, that *another king is arisen, who knoweth not Joseph*, or the obligations that his family are under; a prince who, with the best intentions, has the truth hidden from him by churchmen like Mr. Madan, who, without reminding him that the Dissenters were the steadiest friends of his grandfather, and great grandfather, will persuade him that they are *his enemies*, and wish to overturn his government; and we have not the same access to him that they have, and so have no opportunity of informing him better. And though he should give us a hearing, his attention has been pre-occupied by such men as Mr. Madan, who have told him that our declarations are not to be trusted. But, my generous countrymen, we think it our happiness that we have access to you, and perhaps finally, through you, to the king himself. Before your tribunal I arraign Mr. Madan, of *evil speaking* and *calumny*; and whether it be *intentional*, or not, the
injury

injury that we receive from it is the same. So far he advances his accusations as *unquestionable axioms*. I demand his *proofs*, and do not wish for more impartial judges than yourselves.

Mr. Madan is a young man, and may not have had leisure to read much English history; but he has *heard* and *seen* something; and there is a fact so recent, as to be within his memory, which demonstrates that the Dissenters in general were as ready as the members of the established church to express their approbation of the measures of the king, when they imagined (whether justly or not) that his prerogative was in danger of being trampled upon. This was the memorable period of the *coalition*, when the Dissenters were particularly forward in their addresses to give their sanction to the measures of a court which had always been unfriendly to them. Would they have done this if they had been, *from principle*, hostile to the king, and disposed to take a pleasure in thwarting him?

But what has been the return for this unquestionable proof of our loyalty and zeal? Has it secured to us the gratitude of the king, or the *minister*, whose cause we espoused? We are still, however, ready, as on many former occasions, to *do good for evil*, and to shew our loyalty on any future occasion, whenever we shall think the just prerogative of the king, as well as that of the commons, really violated. We consider not what others ought to do, but only what becomes ourselves, as good citizens, and friends to the genuine principles of the constitution.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER III.

*The Inconclusiveness of Mr. Madan's Reasoning on this Subject
demonstrated from a Variety of Considerations.*

My good Friends and Neighbours,

ADMITTING that Mr. Madan was right in his strange notion, that they were the *Presbyterians* who put king Charles to death, and that this was in itself the most criminal of all transactions, an enormity never to be expiated by all the public calamities that ever befel a nation; can he be justified in charging it upon *us*, or in imputing to us the same maxims, at the distance of more than *four generations*, because we bear the same *name*? Do not bodies of men, and whole nations, change their principles, in a course of years, even much more than individual persons; and must they who are now innocent suffer for the sins of their remotest ancestors? I shall mention a few well known facts, to shew how unreasonable such imputations would be.

The most turbulent of all religionists at the time of the reformation were the *Anabaptists* in Germany. But the *Mennonites*, who are much more properly descended from them, than the Presbyterians of this age from those in the time of Charles I. are the most peaceable and inoffensive of mankind. They are perfect Quakers. The clergy of this country do not, in several respects, hold the same principles now that their ancestors did at the time of the reformation. Their doctrines were then Calvinistic, as the thirty-nine articles, and all the writings of that age, abundantly shew. But Arminianism came in with archbishop Laud, and has been prevalent among the clergy to this day. Then also they, as well as almost all the christian world, were *intolerant*. But happily all Europe, and England, has since that time received much light on this important subject, so that no person

person will now openly avow himself a friend to *persecution*.

Admitting then that, contrary to all evidence of facts, the old Presbyterians were the persons principally concerned in the killing, or the murder, of king Charles I. that they were then determined enemies of *all kings*, and that Scotland, occupied chiefly by Presbyterians, never had a king, it does not follow but that the Presbyterians of this day, and especially those of England, who have seen many good kings (far better, in their opinion at least, than either of the Charles's, or their father James, before them) may not be very well reconciled to kingly government. Allowing all that Mr. Madan has said, notoriously false as it is, of the old Presbyterians, it will not follow that we *now*, all of us, carry daggers about us, ready to strike at every king we meet with, or that we are in any sense, those dangerous people that Mr. Madan represents us. The very terms of *Presbyterian* and *Independant* have changed their meaning since the last century ; so that nothing that may be alleged, though with truth, concerning *them*, can be any just ground of accusation against *us*.

If Mr. Madan means that the present Presbyterians, or Independants, are the lineal descendants of the old ones, and that the same *king killing principles* have been transmitted from father to son, he will find himself still more embarrassed in his argument. For many persons, we see every day, adopt principles unknown to their ancestors. My own grandfather was a Churchman, and bishop Horsley's was a Dissenter. But do I, on that account, retain any of the principles of Churchmen, or the bishop those of Dissenters. I do not believe that any such thing is suspected of either of us. Our worthy rector of St. Martin's is in the same predicament. But who entertains the least doubt of the disinterested purity of *his* zeal for the church, or thinks that he ever looks back to the principles of his family ? King Charles himself, like Bishop Horsley's father, was the son of a Presbyterian, who for the sake of *preferment* conformed

to the church of England, which is a coincidence of circumstances not a little remarkable; and I mention it as what may farther recommend my friend the bishop to the admirers of the royal and blessed martyr. If the sons of the bishop, like those of this king, should become Catholics, the parallel will be still more complete.

It is true that more is required of new converts, as a proof of their sincerity (on the same principles that *miracles* require stronger evidence than *ordinary facts*) but the king gave these abundant proofs, and the bishop has done the same. Though no person, I believe, ever questioned the sincerity of king Charles's attachment to the church of England, notwithstanding his father had been a Presbyterian, there are some, however, so unreasonable as to require more evidence than they have yet seen of the bishop's disinterested attachment to it. But then there are persons whom the evidence of *miracles* will not satisfy.

To make Mr. Madan's accusation at all probable, he should point out some *connection* between the principles of Dissenters, and the *republican*, or *king killing principles* that he ascribes to them. Now, though I have frequently turned the subject over in my own mind, I cannot fix upon any religious principles that we are either known, or supposed, to hold, that could lead him to imagine that we have any predilection for a republican government, or entertain a greater *antipathy to kings* than any other classes of men. Besides, our principles are so *various*, and some of them so directly *opposite* to those of others, that if some were favourable to republican government, others must be as favourable to monarchical.

What just now perhaps distinguishes us the most is, that some of us are *Trinitarians*, some *Arians*, and others *Unitarians*. If Mr. Madan judge by the *majority*, the Trinitarians only must be the Republicans, and myself and friends, who are the minority, must be good royalists. Or, since the great body of Dissenters pray *extempore*, and myself and a few more use our own *pre-composed forms* (and I have even declared

declared a preference for *a liturgy*) I ought on this account also to be excepted from the charge of republicanism, which falls on Dissenters in general. Most dissenting ministers pray in a plain black coat. If the republicanism lie in *that*, I and a few others, who conform so far as to wear a *gown and cassock* in the pulpit, because we find it convenient (especially as a cover for a rusty coat, or a tattered pair of breeches) have a third ground of exception from a charge that affects the rest of the Dissenters.

But, my good friends, to be serious, though it is difficult to be so in replying to a charge so absurd and ridiculous as that of Mr. Madan; what have any notions about the trinity, what have modes of prayer, or modes of dress, or any thing else belonging to Dissenters, to do with systems of civil government?

Mr. Madan will, no doubt, say that our disloyalty arises from some principle that is *common to all Dissenters*, though we differ ever so much in other respects. Now, we agree in nothing but this, that we equally reject all *human authority in matters of religion*. But surely that does not imply that we reject all authority in *civil matters*, since the things are in themselves totally different. It is a maxim with us to *render to God the things that are God's*; but then there is another maxim, the counterpart of this, which is equally sacred with us, viz. *to render to Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's*. Our Saviour saw no inconsistency in these maxims, neither do we.

If it be a general spirit of disobedience and revolt that necessarily seizes all Dissenters, our wives and children, whom we endeavour to make as good Dissenters as ourselves, must partake of it; and that would shew itself in the disorder of private families, in the disobedience of wives to their husbands, children to their parents, and servants to their masters. But if Mr. Madan visited any families of Dissenters, he would find them as well regulated as those of the established church, where the principles of *passive obedience*

obedience and non-resistance, no doubt, keep all in perfect subjection to one head.

Now, what becomes of an *hypothesis*, when there are no *facts* to support it? If there be no conspiracy of Dissenters against the government, no peculiarly refractory disposition of the wives of the Dissenters against their husbands, or peculiar obstinacy in Dissenters' children towards their parents, what evidence is there of the existence of a *turbulent disposition* in Dissenters at all? Mr. Madan should attend more than he has done to the connexion of *causes and effects*, and then he will find himself compelled to give up his favourite hypothesis of the universal disposition to *republicanism*, and consequently, as he will suppose, to *anarchy*, in the principles of the Dissenters.

It was particularly fortunate for the *Anabaptists*, that there were but few of them in England at the time of the civil wars, and that the mention of them does not occur in any civil transactions of the times. For as they had been the most turbulent of all the sectaries in Germany, they would certainly have come in for their share of Mr. Madan's censure, who would never have been persuaded but that they had brought their seditious principles with them into this country. They now fall under his censure (which includes *them* as well as all other Dissenters) merely because they keep bad company, and go by a bad name. For this reason too, the Quakers also, and the English Catholics, ought to bear their share of this censure, and the calumny being divided among so many, it will hardly be felt by any individual. This, I flatter myself, will be the case when, as classes of men equally aggrieved by the laws now existing, we shall all join in one petition for the repeal of all *penal laws in matters of religion*, and, without swords in our hands, *demand*, as our natural and just *right*, the civil privileges of other subjects.

If the sins of remote ancestors are to be imputed to people now living, and Mr. Madan had been a Welshman, he

he might urge his countrymen to make war upon the English, for driving them out of their lawful possessions in the time of Hengist and Horfa. Do not then follow Mr. Madan in looking for the guilt of the present generation in that of another, one hundred and fifty years ago, but consider our conduct at present; and of this, without having recourse to history, you can judge yourselves, and you will not be misled by preachers, who, by taking advantage of your ignorance, may impose upon you.

However, after all that has been urged a thousand times and from the clearest evidence of history, to exculpate the present Dissenters from the horrid crime of cutting off king Charles's head, this guilt, like *original sin*, is so entailed upon us, that I believe, it must descend to our latest posterity, and even to the day of judgment. It is even ready to seize all the proselytes we may make, whether they be the posterity of Charles himself, or of his executioners. The clergy have repeated the accusation so often, and in such strong modes of asseveration, as the *settled principles and conviction of their hearts*, that they seem to believe it as firmly as they do any of the *thirty-nine articles*; so that in time it may take its place among them, and make a *fortieth*; though they will then exceed the number of *forty stripes save one*, which was the limit of castigation in the Jewish law; and many who must subscribe them or starve, I am persuaded, would rather chuse that one were taken away, than that any more were added to them. We are the *sheep*, and our accusers are the *wolves*, and, say what we will, we must be guilty.

Indeed, the more I reflect on the temper with which Mr. Madan must have written, the more concern it gives me, as an unpromising *feature of the times* we live in; reasoning as follows. If his good sense can be thus blinded, and if, notwithstanding the sweetness of his temper, and his polished manners, his passions can be so violently inflamed, as to abuse us innocent Dissenters in the manner that he has done, what must be the strength of those *principles* which

have produced so unlooked for an effect? And what have we not to dread from them in persons of inferior understandings, of less liberal education, and of harsher dispositions? I should not even wonder if, in understandings more clouded, and tempers more irascible, this extreme bigotry should produce the effects of absolute insanity.

If Mr. Madan can really consider all the Dissenters of the present day as unquestionably republicans, and so strongly insinuate that we are all ready to treat the present king as Oliver Cromwell did Charles I. I have reason to rejoice in the *Act of indemnity*. Without this I should now expect that, though my ancestors, being churchmen, might have fought under the standard of Charles I. I, being a Dissenter, should be actually indicted for the crime of murdering that blessed martyr, and that myself and my three sons (for the politeness and *mildness* of which Mr. Madan makes such a boast would perhaps spare my daughter) might be hanged, drawn and quartered, for our share in that horrid transaction.

The philosophical world has of late been amused with a story of a poisonous tree in the island of Java, that would not suffer any plant to grow, or any animal to approach, within twelve miles of it. But the murder of this king has a far more baneful and extensive influence; and according to appearance, we can never remove far enough from it. I should think, however, that the clergy should fix some time, *a thousand years* for example (for I would not be unreasonable in fixing too short a term of probation) after which, if the Dissenters should behave like other subjects, and kill no more kings, it should be deemed illiberal in such preachers as Mr. Madan to charge us with the crimes of *republicanism*, and *king-killing*. However, it seems hardly fair to infer a *habit* from a *single act*, and we are not charged with killing any more kings than one.

The great merit, however, of this king Charles was his attachment to the church of England, to which the clergy consider him as having been *a martyr*; and for this reason

it

it is that they pursue with such indiscriminate vengeance all persons, whom they can have any pretence, how improbable soever, for charging with it. For this reason I shall in a future Letter consider the nature and value of *civil establishments of religion* in general, and then proceed to that of the *church of England* in particular, that you may judge whether it be *reason*, or merely *interest* and *passion*, that dictates such Sermons as those of Mr. Madan. Hoping a more favourable hearing than we have hitherto had, I remain,

My good friends and neighbours,

Yours, &c.

P. S. My next Letter will relate to the *Corporation and Test Acts*, and I shall prove to you that neither the *state*, nor the *church*, have any thing more to fear from the repeal of them than from the repeal of the old statutes concerning witches, or from making any new ones concerning canals or turnpike roads, but that both would be gainers by the measure. Nay, I should not wonder, if, when these acts are repealed, the clergy should take to themselves the merit of all that has been done to promote it, as they do with respect to the *act of toleration*, after all the aversion they shewed to that measure.

LETTER IV.

Of the Corporation and Test Acts.

My generous Townsmen and Neighbours

THE nature of the *Corporation and Test Acts*, which have occasioned all this writing and preaching, has been strangely misrepresented to you, and Mr. Madan's Sermon has no tendency to clear it up. But plain men may judge of *plain things*, at least by their *effects*, without much deep reasoning on the subject. Mr. Madan says, p. 12, that "the Dissenters are under no disability which can possibly be avoided consistently with our own security," that is, the security of the *church*. Now, without considering what the Corporation and Test Acts are in themselves, you see that, according to Mr. Madan, they are things without which the church cannot be *secure*, if it could *exist* at all. But, though I am not of your church, and therefore you cannot suppose that I think it to be the best of all possible churches, I have a much better opinion of it, in some respects, than Mr. Madan has, or any of those high church men, who, on this occasion, are such zealous sticklers for it. They must think it a poor weak, and infirm thing, indeed, of no strength at all, in its own constitution, or they would never fancy such supports as these to be necessary to it. I can clearly shew them from *history* and *fact*, that it is much better established than their fears will allow them to think it is.

If these acts were really necessary to the security of your church, it is plain that it could never have done without them. And I dare say that, after reading Mr. Madan's Sermon, and every thing else that has been written by your clergy (men of great courage no doubt, but who are
frightened

frightened to death on this particular subject) you take it for granted that your church never was without these Corporation and Test Acts, being its necessary *body guards*; and least of all that it was without them in its tender *infancy*, when it must most of all have wanted support. But through all the reigns of Henry VIII. Edward VI. Elizabeth, James I. Charles I. and till the latter end of that of Charles II. viz. 1672, in all which time it rose from nothing to its full strength and glory, there was no Test Act at all. All those princes were allowed to employ whom they thought proper in all business of a civil nature, and no inconvenience whatever arose from it. Nor when the Test act was made was any evil dreaded from the *Protestant Dissenters*. Nay they themselves most zealously concurred in passing it. The danger then was from the *Catholics* only, on account of the next heir to the crown being a Catholic. Before this, viz. in 1661, mere *party spirit*, and not any regard to the *safety of the state*, had given birth to the *Corporation Act*.

If these Acts be really necessary in *England*, they must be much more so in *Ireland*, where the church establishment is much weaker than it is here, not more than one in ten of the inhabitants of that country being of it; and yet in this very reign, viz. A.D. 1779, the Test Act has been repealed there; and though, according to Mr. Madan, the church must necessarily have fallen with it, it still exists, and there is even less danger of its being overturned than before. Because the Dissenters, being conciliated, and put into good humour by the measure, are less than ever disposed to be hostile to the church. Being, in all civil matters, equally favoured by government with the members of the established church, and not lying under the reproach of being *unfit to be trusted with power*, though they have not in fact any more power than they had before, they consider themselves as in a more respectable situation, and are disposed to be contented with it; leaving the clergy to manage their own affairs, and enjoy all their emoluments as before. But when men are treated like dogs, they will snarl at those who hold

hold the whip over them, whether they receive a blow or not.

You will naturally ask, how came the church to be so liberal to the Dissenters in Ireland, and so hostile to them in England. I will explain the whole in a very few words. There was no *liberality* in the case. But the Dissenters in Ireland are much more numerous in proportion to the members of the establishment in that country than they are in this; and therefore, notwithstanding the measure must have appeared much more *hazardous* (which is the plea for refusing *us*) the *court*, and of course the *clergy*, did not think it *prudent* to refuse their request. There were no meetings of the clergy on the occasion, no such sermons as Mr. Madan's were preached, and lords and commons were, I believe, unanimous in passing the bill. But here the court is at present against us, and the clergy (though the church would not receive a shadow of harm from the measure, as the experience of Ireland for the last eleven years abundantly proves) indulge themselves in shewing their dislike to us, because they can do it with impunity.

For the same reasons we were twice repulsed when we petitioned to be relieved from the obligation we were most unreasonably laid under to subscribe the greater part of the articles of your church, a church with which we have nothing to do, and from which we receive no emolument. But the court, wishing to shew some favour to the *Catholics*; and fearing lest a clamour would be raised by the more sober part of the nation, if something was not done for *us* too, thought proper at length to grant our request; and then nothing more was heard of any opposition from the clergy. Such is the policy of a court, and such the operation of the fundamental principle of *passive-obedience, and non-resistance* in the clergy, ever true to the terms of their *alliance with the state*.

If these Acts were repealed, there would be no visible change whatever in the aspect of public affairs, respecting church or state. It would not, in fact, give any additional power

power to the Dissenters, nor, if it did, could that power be employed to the injury of the church. It is not *reason*, or even *self defence*, or *self interest*, that has driven the generality of your clergy to this violence against us; but merely *bigotry* and *passion*. Many men of the best understanding among them clearly see this, and wonder as much as I do, at the general infatuation.

Besides, is it for the credit of the church of England to suppose it to be naturally weaker, and to stand in more need of foreign support, independent of a voluntary attachment to it, as founded in truth, than other established churches? No other national church (and they are found in almost all parts of the christian world) has any such security as this, or has ever found the want of it. Mr. Madan, indeed, quotes Dean Swift, p. 26, in saying that "in Holland none are admitted into civil offices who do not conform to the legal worship." But Swift*, like the late Dr. Johnson, debased a good natural understanding with the lowest bigotry. He neither knew, nor cared to know, any thing

* The contemptuous manner in which Swift always mentions *Dissenters*, as if they were not even of the human species, shews the despicable narrowness of his mind: and yet a passage of his writings, in which this is the most conspicuous, is quoted with approbation by Mr. Madan. 'The offer of their abilities,' says Mr. Madan, p. 26, 'integrity and learning, and all that may be intended by their *quick-fighted talents*' (alluding in a sneer to an expression in one of my publications) 'for the service of the state, will be sufficiently noticed by a short extract from Swift. "Their zeal, says he, is commendable, and when employments go a begging for want of hands, they shall be sure to have the refusal; only upon condition that they will not pretend to them upon maxims which equally include Atheists, Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics, or which is still more dangerous, even Papists themselves." This is the *contempt* of the *contemptible*, which shews the writer not worthy to rank with any of the classes of men he here enumerates. When I read such stuff as this, and find it the language of this day, as much as it was in the time of Sacheverel, I bless God that I was born a *free Dissenter*, not manacled by the chains of so debasing a system as that of the church of England, and that I was not educated at Oxford or Cambridge. My education, in this at least unspeakably more liberal than theirs, has taught me to esteem *Papists, Jews, Turks, Infidels, Heretics*, and even *Atheists* if they be honest men, and the *Church-of-England-man* too who despises me. It is because he has been no better taught, or because God has not given him a better understanding.

about the Dissenters, and he paid no regard to truth or decency in his invectives against them. What he said of the Dutch Mr. Madan might easily know not to be true in fact. For though every burgomaster, and those who administer justice, must have subscribed the national confession of faith, no test is required of those who serve in the army or navy, which are offices of infinitely more power; and in these there are instances of their employing even Roman Catholics.

It is plain, however, that Mr. Madan was not able to quote any other instance of such illiberality as disgraces this country. Before the late revolution in France a Protestant had been at the head of the French army against other Protestants, and another had been their prime minister in civil affairs, without any apprehension being entertained by the most bigoted of the Catholics for the safety of their established church. Lord North told us that this was one of the *accidental advantages of an arbitrary government*. But this liberal system is continued now that that government is become more free than ours. The catholic religion still continues in France, though Protestants are admissible into all places of trust or power.

Is there not an established church in Scotland, as well as in England? and does not *that* subsist very well without any Test Act, even with the disadvantage of its king being of another religion? Yet they allow that king to employ whom he pleases in all offices of trust and power in Scotland, without shewing any fear for the safety of their national religion. It is plain, therefore, that the Scotch clergy, who have never made any complaint or remonstrance on the subject, have far more confidence in the goodness and stability of their ecclesiastical establishment than the English clergy, who are so miserably and so universally panic struck, have with respect to theirs. You, brave Englishmen, must be ashamed of such *cowards*.

But what is this Test Act, and what can it do for your church, or for any church? If it cannot be supported without

out it; I am very sure that it cannot with it. For it is no more than *a cobweb*, which any fly may break through. In order to qualify for a civil office, it requires that a person should receive the communion according to the rites of the church of England. But this is what most Dissenters now do without violating their conscience at all. You see that both Mr. Russell and Mr. Taylor in your own neighbourhood, have done it, and in consequence hold the office of *justice of the peace*. These are men of honour and principle, proper to be trusted with any degree of power. But bad men, against whom alone you ought to be upon your guard, even Atheists, men of no religion, who laugh at your church, and who will support it no longer than it supports them, make no scruple at all of conforming to this Test. They are ready to kneel at the rails of your chancel whenever they are called upon, and laugh in their sleeve all the time.

To make this Test any thing like a real guard to the church, and exclude from offices of trust and power, all who are not *bona fide* members of it, you should insist upon their communicating *habitually*, and not only *that*, but on their attending your public worship every Lord's-day. Whereas, the fact is, that very few persons in any considerable office attend the service of your church at all, except when the duties of their office absolutely require it. This Test Act, which you now make your sheet anchor, the main pillar within the church, and the great buttress without it, can in fact do nothing for it. It only excludes some scrupulously conscientious men, who in general are not much qualified for public business, and who might be very innocently admitted into any place. We chiefly object to this act because that it is *disgraceful* to us, though much more so to the country which imposes it.

The existence of this Act is not of a piece with the liberality of the country in other respects. For Dissenters may be peers, or they may sit in the house of commons. There, you say, there is no danger from them, because their number is inconsiderable. But would not that be the very
same

same with respect to any other places of trust and power. If the obnoxious Acts were repealed, Dissenters would not be admitted into offices but at the nomination of the crown, and certainly not in such numbers as to make them formidable. For if persons of all religious persuasions were employed alike, in proportion to their numbers, there would always be the same over-balance of officers belonging to the established religion; which would be sufficient to counteract the attempts of their brother officers of all the different sects, especially as these would, of course, be divided among themselves.

If, for example, there should be an hundred officers in the army or navy belonging to the established church, and ten, or even twenty, of half a dozen different sects, what is it that could be apprehended from them? In fact much less than now. Because as things now are, all Dissenters have a *principle of union* among themselves, in their common exclusion from civil offices, which would not then exist. All would rather be disposed to pay their court to the chief magistrate, who had the power of giving to each particular person what he wished to obtain, which would naturally give him a bias in favour of his religion, viz. that of the state. Consequently, the present system is as *impolitic*, as it is *unjust*, if the *safety of the church* be the object; and on this principle some Dissenters prefer their present situation. Admission to civil offices at the nomination of the court would, as they say, dispose men to favour the court, and to become less zealous as Dissenters; and the clergy themselves, if they were not blinded by their rage against the Dissenters, might see this. But in this and in many other respects, their conduct favours of a kind of *infatuation*, such as generally precedes *ruin*. If you, who are tradesmen, should act with no more judgment in the conduct of *your* affairs, than they do with respect to *theirs*, you would soon become bankrupts.

Mr. Madan says, p. 17, that "the legislature has endeavoured to provide for the security of the state by those means which ought to be effectual with every man, as the
"strongest

“strongest and most awful which can possibly be used.” But certainly this is saying a great deal too much. I have shewn you very plainly how it might have been made much stronger; and if what I have above proposed should not be thought sufficient, let every civil officer be made to swear *allegiance to the church of England*. Make them vow perpetual enmity to all Dissenters, and hostility even to the prince upon the throne if he should ever be hostile to the church, or be discovered to look with the least degree of complacency upon a single Dissenter. This method would be much more effectual, and certainly more *decent*, than the prostitution of a sacred ordinance of religion to so profane and foreign a purpose as the qualification for a civil office.

An *oath* expressly declares the purpose for which it is administered. A man is thereby made to profess some specific thing, which it may be proper for the government that he should profess, in order that, if he was found to violate his oath, he might be subject to a certain penalty. But the mere act of receiving the Lord’s-supper, without any declaration annexed to it, expressive of the purpose for which it is received, implies no civil obligation at all. The communicant may consider the action in his own light, and many will do it as a token of christian fellowship with other christians of a different communion. On this idea the famous Mr. Baxter, though a steady Dissenter (having refused a bishopric that was offered him) chose to communicate once a year with the church of England; and other Dissenters have voluntarily done the same; not as members of the church of England themselves, but to shew their brotherly respect for it.

If the sense of the legislature may be admitted in the interpretation of any law, a Dissenter may have less scruple in communicating with the church of England in order to his admission into any civil office, because it is well known that the law was not meant to exclude Dissenters, but only Catholics.

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According, therefore, to the manner in which the Lord's supper is required to be received by candidates for civil offices, it is no security at all to the church of England; but an horrible prophanation of one of her sacred rites, and such as must be the occasion of much scandal to the truly pious members of your church. If a man perform any *religious act*, whatever it be, he should be left to his own liberty to perform it when he finds himself in a proper disposition for it. But in this case, whether a man think himself qualified or unqualified, whether he be disposed or indisposed to the religious exercise, the ceremony must be performed. What pain then must this give to serious clergymen, who are directed by the canons of the church not to give the communion to persons whom they deem to be *unworthy*, and yet are compellable by act of parliament to administer it, without distinction, to all who are appointed to public offices*?

Now, though I differ from you who are of the church of England with respect to some of your *tenets*, and the form of your *church government*, I trust we feel alike for the honour of what is common to us as *christians*; and this, you must confess, is disgraced by the statutes which we petition to have repealed. They are such statutes as unbelievers would have made, in order to turn your sacraments, and your religion, into ridicule. If, therefore, you really wish to exclude us Dissenters from all civil offices, do it *effectually*, but in a more decent and proper manner, such as will shew that it is your *religion* that you value, and that you wish to guard by this provision. But if you find, as you must have done already, that no inconvenience has in fact arisen from Dissenters (among whom are to be reckoned Scotchmen, who, though Presbyterians, must take the Test

* A serious member of the church of England happening to attend prayers in a church where, without his knowing it, it was the custom to administer the Lord's-supper for the sake of qualifying persons to receive civil offices, chose to communicate with them. But when he was afterwards taking his hat to walk out, the clerk stepped up to him and said, "Sir, it will do you no good if you have not a certificate."

as well as we) being in civil offices, and there are perhaps as many of them in such offices now, as there would be if the Test was abolished, throw it aside at once, as a thing that is equally *disgraceful* and *useless*, and provide no substitute for it at all.

How weak then, you see, is this *barrier* which Mr. Madan says, p. 23, "the wisdom of a former age has "erected for its defence," viz. that of your church, "and "which the experience of a century has proved to be effectual." I think, however, that I have abundantly shewn that this is ascribing a great deal too much to this boasted statute, whereas it is only like a fly upon the chariot wheel, saying *What a dust I raise*. If the experience of a century has proved this barrier to be effectual, the experience of two preceding centuries, and also that of Ireland at present, proves it to be perfectly insignificant.

If you look into the *Resolutions* passed by the clergy at their several meetings, to defeat our application to parliament, or into the pamphlets that have been written by the friends of the establishment on the subject, you will find them triumphing most of all in asserting the right that all men, and all societies of men, have to chuse their own servants, and to say who they are that they think proper to trust with any degree of power. This country, they say, has even laid similar restrictions on the exercise of kingly power, by making a Roman catholic ineligible to that office. What then, say they, have Dissenters to complain of more than other classes of persons, even the highest?

Now, my friends, we never questioned the *absolute right* of the legislature to pass any act respecting Dissenters, or any other description of men, but only the *wisdom* of their conduct. It will not be denied but that any man has a right to employ one of his hands to cut off the other, but would not all the world call him a fool for so doing?

The legislature of this country may, no doubt, carry their plan of disabilities, in a variety of respects, much farther than they have done. They might exclude all officers of the army or navy, all lawyers, all tradesmen, and even all

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bishops,

bishops, from a seat in either house of parliament. An act may be made to prevent the king employing in his service all men who have red hair, or, if that be complained of as a natural incapacity, all who should wear wigs. But the question is whether it would be *wise* to act in this manner, whether it would be consulting the good of the country to subject the executive power to such restrictions. Now we think it as *unwise*, and therefore, strictly speaking, as *wrong*, and as contrary to *proper and natural right*, to say that the king and the country shall not be served by Dissenters, if, in other respects, they be well qualified to serve them.

I would farther observe that this business would be better conducted if Dissenters as such, were absolutely prohibited from being admitted into civil offices; so that their nomination and election should be null and void, and not permit them, as is the case at present in corporate towns, to have a regular nomination to an office, and to allow the validity of their acts while they are in it, and then subject them to a dreadful penalty, such as nothing but the greatest of crimes can justify, for having accepted it. For the penalty is the payment of five hundred pounds, being disabled from suing or prosecuting in any court of law, being guardians of any child, being executors or administrators of any person, and being incapable of receiving any legacy or deed of gift. There is nothing in the civil policy of any other country so *cruel*, and at the same time so *insidious* as this. This is in a country the laws of which, and especially its *criminal law*, is so much the boast of its inhabitants! However, great numbers of the members of your church are just now in the same situation, so that, if the Dissenters were so disposed, they might take ample revenge. For if the prosecution be begun before the *act of indemnity* (which from the general neglect of complying with the Test is always found necessary every sessions of parliament) be passed, the law must have its course. But I hope no Dissenters will follow such an example, if it should be set them by any members of the church of England. I trust we are better christians.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

*Of the Defeat of the Dissenters in the House of Commons,
March, 2, 1790, and the Conduct of the Clergy in pro-
curing it.*

SINCE I wrote the preceding letter, your clergy (for it has been *their* measure and not *yours*, and in the pursuit of it they have consulted their enmity to the Dissenters rather than either their own reason, or your interest) have gained their point. After a full discussion of the question before the house of Commons a great majority appeared against the repeal. The clergy have had their triumph, and, no doubt, exult in our defeat; nor do we envy them. For we are not in the least discouraged. We know mankind too well to expect that, imposed upon as they have been so long, they will hear the plainest reasons the first, or the second time that they are presented to them. Assure yourselves that they will be presented again and again, a fourth, a fifth; and if necessary, a fiftieth time. We shall give abundant exercise for the talent your clergy appear to have for invective, and many more inflammatory sermons, such as Mr. Madan's, will be preached and published. We also, while we are able to speak, shall *preach*, and while the press is open to us, we shall not fail to *write*, in our own defence; and after a few years more the nation at large must be stupid indeed, if they do not perfectly understand the subject. And as we are more than ever confident that *reason, justice, and sound policy* are clearly on our side, we have no doubt but that the final decision will be in our favour. We shall even ask more than we have hitherto done, and shall not be refused.

When we consider how many more friends we have now, that all the influence of a popular king, and all the

arts of an insidious minister are against us (no stone having been left unturned to defeat our application) than we had in the two last reigns, when the court was uniformly in our favour, we are convinced that liberal sentiments, favourable to our just claims, have gained much ground; and we are confident, from the encreasing liberality of the age (the progress of which all the clergymen in England can no more put a stop to, than they can prevent the sun, after he is risen, from ascending to his meridian altitude) will gain ground more and more. As to the *clergy*, we make ourselves perfectly easy about them. For should the *court* once more smile upon us (and courts you know are changeable things) should the minister of the day only give a single nod, their opposition will vanish as by a charm. It will be like throwing a few drops of Dr. Franklin's oil upon the waves, which will make their troubled waters as smooth as a looking glass. Mr. Madan may preach again from the same text *to speak evil of no man, and to be gentle towards all men*; but it will be a very different sermon from that which is now before you, and much more agreeable to the spirit of the apostle. The bishops of this reign would, in such a case, instantly become as liberal as those of the last; and as to the *inferior clergy*, they would wheel about as quickly as soldiers on a parade when the word of command is given in the presence of the king in St. James's park. Indeed, to be consistent with themselves, they must *obey the higher powers* whatever they are. For the *powers that be are ordained of God*, and therefore *to resist the power*, as Mr. Madan has been careful to remind you, *is to resist the ordinance of God*.

Should the king, like Ahasuerus in the book of Esther, vi. 1. *not be able to sleep*, and call upon one of the lords of his bedchamber *to read to him out of the book of the records of the chronicles* of the kings of England, and should there find who had been the most zealous for the revolution under king William, for the accession of the House of Hanover, and for the suppression of the rebellions in 1715 and 1745,
and

and who took his part even in a late change of administration, and then inquire *what honour and dignity* (ch. vi. 6.) had been done to his friends, and the friends of his family, and learn that, instead of any thing having been done to *reward*, much had been done to *mortify* and *punish* them; that to this very day they had been persecuted by lies and calumnies, as *men whose laws were diverse from those of all other people, and who do not keep the king's laws*, and therefore say, *that it is not for the king's profit to suffer them* (ch. iii. 8.) poor despised Mordecai may be advanced, and some other use be made of the gallows that was erected for him.

In the mean time, we Dissenters are perfectly satisfied with the uprightness of our views, and the justness of our cause, and shall patiently wait till the nation shall coolly reconsider the question; unless the clergy rising as (if they receive no check from above) they naturally will, in their violence against us, should, in order the better to secure the interest of their church, procure a law to *banish* (for they will hardly now think of *burning*) us all; and then, as some of them are now known to boast that they have no Dissenters in their parishes, they may join in one general *Te Deum*, that there are none in the nation; and that we are all driven to France or America, where they suppose we shall meet with spirits congenial to our own. If, in consequence of this, as the Dissenters have always been an industrious people, another Birmingham and another Manchester should be established there, they will only rejoice the more, that all the taxes, and all the tithes, then perhaps doubled, will be paid chearfully by the *genuine sons of the church*, and that their pockets will be no more contaminated with the fees of Dissenters. Then will *church and state* congratulate each other, and be as sociable and happy as the *two kings of Brentford*, dreading no *gunpowder*, real or metaphorical.

With respect to your interest as a trading nation, and the several *articles of your manufacture*, what are they compared to the *articles of religion*? Any one of the thirty-nine is of more value than an hundred of those in your invoices. The

church is even before the *king*, and the king, no doubt, before his *subjects*. Let the *church* therefore, that is, the clergy, be by all means gratified in the first place, the *king* in the next, and you, the *people*, keeping your proper order, in the last.

The zeal of your clergy for the church may best be estimated by the *sacrifices* they make to it; and I can shew you that, in order to prevent the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, which they consider as necessary to the security of the church, they have sacrificed a thing of far more value to them than their temporal interest. For they have thought the cause so good, that it deserved to be promoted at the expence even of *truth*. You will also see, by the account which I shall give you of their conduct, that mere zeal for the church is not the whole of their merit. They have shewn great *ability* in the management of their affairs, and are as fit for ministers of state, as for the service of the church.

Thinking it of some consequence to their purpose, that some Dissenters, whose names are known to the public (so that it might be imagined that their sentiments would be those of some considerable number at least of the body to which they belonged) should be represented as factious men, and enemies to government in church and state, they sent, too late to be discovered and counteracted, to every member of the House of Commons, and to all the bishops, a *printed paper* (a copy of which I have in my hands) containing *Extracts from the preface to my Letters to Mr. Burn*, so disposed, and mutilated, as to give a very unfair view of my real principles and conduct; and of this paper a most important use was made by Mr. Burke in the course of the debate, raising the indignation of the house against me, and the Dissenters in general, as being supposed to avow sentiments equally violent with myself.

I shall give the following paragraph as a specimen of the whole, that you may judge of their proceedings yourselves. That which is printed in the *Roman* character is their extract,

extract, but what immediately follows in *Italics*, they omitted, evidently because it was not calculated to answer their purpose.

“Whether I be more pleased, or displeased, with their present violence, let them now judge. The greater their violence, the greater is our confidence of final success. *Because it will excite more public discussion, which is all that is necessary for our purpose.*” Preface, p. 15.

Without the latter clause of this paragraph, which they artfully kept out of sight, it was natural to conclude, as the House no doubt did, that to the violence of the clergy, I was ready to oppose still greater *violence*, and not so inoffensive a thing as mere *argument*.

That my mode of promoting reformation, and of procuring redress of grievances, is of the most pacific nature, you may see in the following paragraph, which is part of a Note (p. 12) in the same Preface, but which you will not wonder that they omitted to quote, because it would no more have answered their purpose, than the last clause of the preceding paragraph.

“It has always been my opinion that Dissenters should not accept of any civil offices for which the majority of their countrymen have pronounced them disqualified, but patiently acquiesce in their exclusion from them, till it shall please God, in the course of his providence, and by means of our peaceable representations and remonstrances, to open the eyes, and enlarge the minds, of our countrymen, and thereby give them more just ideas of the natural rights of men, and of the true interest of their country.”

This *printed paper*, thus artfully managed, served Mr. Burke as a text, from which he declaimed, in his eloquent manner, against myself, and all the Dissenters, just as Mr. Madan has done in his *Sermon*, with this difference, that Mr. Burke was *imposed upon*, and suspecting no fraud, kept to the *text* that was given him; whereas Mr. Madan soon lost sight of *his*. But what will Mr. Burke, and the rest of

the honourable house of Commons say, when they find how they have been taken in?

Mr. Burke is a person with whom I have been well acquainted more than twenty years, and till this affair, he always professed much respect for me, as I had for him. The last time he came through Birmingham, he called at my house, and we had much free and confidential conversation. But how shall we meet after this? He will blame his want of sagacity, in being *over-reached*; but he will say, "how could I expect any deceit from so holy a quarter." Now my friends, you need not be told that they who could do *this*, or knowingly permit others to do it, would do almost *any thing* else to gain the same point. They must have had an *intent to deceive*, and this it is that constitutes the criminality of any wilful violation of truth.

How great, then, must be the value that your clergy (for the suspicion will naturally fall on some of this body) have for the cause of the church, when they risque even their own salvation for the sake of it? The conduct of the apostles themselves was never so disinterested as this. But, like the immortal Curtius, they considered that, if they did not leap into the gulph, the church itself, and all you who belong to it, must have been swallowed up. Now, had there been any *purgatory* in your church, this conduct would not have been so meritorious. For out of purgatory there is redemption, but none from that place to which *whosoever loveth and maketh a lie* (Rev. xxii. 15.) must go. But this being a place only mentioned in sermons, and by polite preachers not even there, I must refer you to your Bibles, if you wish to know any thing more about it. It is possible, however, that as those of the clergy who distinguish themselves the most by their opposition to Dissenters approach a little to the church of Rome, they may think to save themselves by *confessing* and *absolving* one another. And as life is always uncertain, if they be as wise in the affairs of the *next* world as they are in those of *this*, the ceremony is by
this

this time probably over, and their consciences entirely at rest. Think not, however, that they would recommend such conduct to *you*, and thereby risque *your salvation*; since it is only for the sake of the church, in which your salvation, *your lives and safeties all*, are embarked, that they who are *a few*, chuse to run this risque for you who are *many*.

When the mischief is done, the proverb says *we may as well laugh as cry*, because both are equally unavailing, and the former is more pleasant, as well as more conducive to health. I hope, therefore, you will excuse me, though I have not been quite serious on a very serious subject. Indeed, as a serious one, it concerns your clergy and yourselves, much more than it does me. I shall, however, conclude this letter with perfect seriousness.

The temper which your clergy have shewn in preaching, without any provocation whatever, so long, and so violently, against the Dissenters, and the measures they have taken to oppose us, some of them, you see, the most artful and wicked, give us real concern; and we have the less hope of any return of liberality in our favour from seeing such men as Mr. Madan joining the party of the bigots, and retailing with apparent glee the low and malignant scurrility of Swift against the Dissenters of his day.

As to Mr. Burn's being willing to have *a gird at me*, as Falstaff says, it may easily be accounted for. He has a laudable view to rise in his profession; and being a man of good natural understanding, and good elocution, but having had no advantage of education, or family connexions, he may think it necessary to do something in order to make himself conspicuous. And he might suppose he could not do better than follow the sure footsteps of those who had succeeded in the same chace before him. This might appear the more necessary in his case, as, having been a preacher among the Methodists and Dissenters (which, as I am well known highly to respect the Methodists, little as they respect me, and as I am a dissenting minister myself, I cannot mention with any contempt) his attachment to the established church

church might, without doing something of this nature, have been liable to be questioned.

But Mr. Madan is in very different circumstances. He is a gentleman born. His family and connections are respectable; he has had the most liberal education that his country can give. He is a man of a natural good temper, of polished and engaging manners, and the door of preferment is so open to him, that he hardly needs to knock in order to enter. For such a man as he, without any provocation, to deal out such gross abuse, and with such uncommon solemnity, shews what we have to expect from *the times*. If such men as Mr. Madan can divest themselves of all liberality of sentiment, and treat as *rebels*, and *hypocrites*, men with whom they have frequent intercourse, and whom they ought to know better, and consequently to respect, we see that, *as things are now situated*, there is no hope left. If not from such men as he, from whom are we to expect decent treatment? It is a proof that the standard is raised against us, and that all the clergy, and other friends of the court, whether naturally disposed to it or not, must join their ranks, in opposing us.

And what is it that they are pursuing? It is a mere shadow, an unresisting substance. We have neither the power, nor the will, to make any opposition, except in a field in which they cannot meet us, the open field of *reason and argument*. Out of this we can never be forced; and as to this, or any particular country, we are *citizens of the world*; and *if we be persecuted in one place*, we must endeavour, as our Saviour recommends, to *flee to another*. Hoping, however, to be permitted to stay a while longer in a situation so perfectly agreeable to me in other respects, and not having very long to continue in any,

I am, &c.

P. S. The subject of my next Letter will be *Toleration*, which being a thing that Mr. Madan has no want of himself, I shall shew you he has thought little about, and certainly does not understand.

LETTER VI.

Of a Complete Toleration.

My Friends and Countrymen,

MR. Madan, like other writers on the same side of the question, willing to represent *the church* to which he belongs in the best light that he can (and *toleration* being fortunately at this time a reputable thing) gives it the praise of *tolerant*. Now this we Dissenters readily and thankfully acknowledge to a certain degree. The Act of Toleration, passed in the time of king William, which rescued the Dissenters from starving or rotting in dungeons, and which, under certain, though hard, restrictions, allowed them to worship God in the forms they most approved, was a valuable thing. But for this we do not consider ourselves as at all indebted to *the church*, though the bishops might not vote against it. It was the liberality of *the state*, in spite of *the church*. The same was the case with respect to the last boon that we obtained. For it was not till after two repulses, in which the bishops, as usual, voted on the *intolerant* side of the question, that we got excused from subscribing many of the articles of the church of England by which we had been bound before. But still it is well known that another act of parliament remains in force, which makes it eventually confiscation of goods and imprisonment for life for any man, educated a christian, to declare his disbelief of the doctrine of the trinity.

Now, as many of us Dissenters do seriously disbelieve this doctrine of the *trinity*, and even think it our duty to endeavour to bring others to believe as we do, viz. in the doctrine of the *divine unity*, as opposed to that of the *trinity*, it is evident that, while this law subsists, there is no proper *toleration* in this country for *us*. And yet Mr. Madan, knowing

knowing this, and expressly mentioning it, can insult us, as others of the clergy are perpetually doing, by saying, p. 12, that we have "the fullest liberty of conscience and opinion." "This doctrine," (viz. the trinity) says he, p. 19, "the Dissenters think proper to reject, and they are at liberty to reject it," that is at the risque of the penalty above mentioned, which, if any person should be bigot enough to inform against us, neither Mr. Madan, nor any other clergyman, let his disposition towards us be ever so friendly, can prevent being exacted to the uttermost. This certainly is no *toleration*. It is mere *connivance*, and such as any felon may enjoy while nobody thinks proper to prosecute him.

Mr. Madan himself says, p. 21, "I will admit that the rigorous execution of this law would certainly be intolerant." Is it not then plain, that though *Englishmen* may be merciful, the *laws* are unmerciful, and therefore ought to be repealed? You will naturally think that after Mr. Madan himself had taxed the law with intolerance, if *carried into execution* (which is certainly saying nothing at all in favour of the *law*) he would be for the repeal of it. But this by no means follows. Without calling this law any guard of the church, or of the principles of it, which however it was intended to be, and even making a merit of its not being executed, he says, p. 21, "the deliberate repeal of it would certainly operate as a virtual sanction for that conduct which it was enacted to restrain." That is, if there had been any law which made it death to steal an apple, it ought not to be repealed, because that would be a virtual sanction to the stealing of apples. Is not this most curious reasoning? Your clergy, I hope, give you better from the pulpit than in such publications as these. If the *reasoning* of Paul (Acts xxiv. 25.) had been no better than *this*, Felix would have been more disposed to *laugh* than to *tremble*.

It is, indeed, something extraordinary that Mr. Madan's ingenuity should not be able to find some *medium* in this case, either by proportioning the punishment to the crime,

or by repealing a law, which, however well intended, is found to be of no use, and which they are ashamed to execute. Is it not possible to abrogate what is acknowledged to be wrong, without authorizing another wrong? What a poor legislator would Mr. Madan be? You must certainly see, though Mr. Madan cannot, that the repeal of the law of king William, by which we are now forbidden, under the penalty of confiscation of goods and imprisonment for life, to declare our disbelief of the doctrine of the trinity, would only give us the liberty of avowing our principles, and would by no means imply an approbation of them. Will Mr. Madan say that the Act of Toleration implied any approbation of the principles of Dissenters? If so, he himself must approve of them. On the contrary, the legislature would by this generous conduct express their confidence in the solid *reasons* on which the established faith was founded. It would be saying, "We have no occasion to enforce our principles by *penal laws*, having no doubt but that the clergy, the proper defenders of them will be able to support them by *reason and argument*."

But, my friends, this has not been the conduct of the legislators, or of the clergy. Not trusting to *reason*, or the *scriptures*, they must enact *laws*, with heavy penalties, to enforce the belief of their doctrines. And though, through the liberality of the times, and not any particular generosity of their own, they are ashamed to execute them, and we, confiding in this, and not in any proper moderation of theirs, even turn their obsolete laws into ridicule, yet you see that, like *the laws of the Medes and Persians*, they must remain unaltered, together with every thing else that bears the least aspect towards the *church*. This looks as if they themselves considered it as no better than a *castle of cards*, which they are afraid of touching, lest it should all fall to pieces. If good reasons cannot be alleged for retaining what is most manifestly absurd, and what they themselves are ashamed to execute, yet you see that *something* must be said; and weak as it is, I do not know that any thing

thing better can be alleged, than what is here advanced by Mr. Madan, viz. that the repeal of this improper and unjust law to defend the doctrine of the trinity, would be to give a virtual sanction to our conduct in writing against it.

There is another curious and inconsistent circumstance in what Mr. Madan advances on the subject of this famous law. All who believe Christ to be *a man*, and not *God*, must necessarily think it *idolatry* to pay him divine honours. We have no other definition of *idolatry*, than *to worship as God that which is not God*. Do not all Protestants say it is idolatry in the Catholics to pray to the Virgin Mary, to Peter, Paul, or any other saints, or even to angels and arch-angels? Do you not continually charge the Catholics with idolatry on this principle? Now, it is upon the very same principle, and no other, that we, who consider Christ as being a man, such as Peter and Paul were, say that it must be *idolatry* to worship, or to pray to *him*. This is only the necessary consequence of avowing our belief. Yet Mr. Madan will allow us the one, without the other; as if he would allow us to *think* Trinitarians to be idolators, without permitting us to *call* them so. "They insult us," he says, p. 19, "with the charge of idolatry, on account of 'this doctrine,' viz. the trinity, 'they are at liberty so to 'do, through the mildness of our principles, though perhaps they have not a right to do it, upon any principle 'whatever;' that is, we have no right to *say* what we cannot help *thinking*. Where then is our toleration? Alas, it exists only in the *mildness of men's principles*, that is in their *good nature*, which is a very changeable thing, and not in the *laws*. If this *mildness* which Mr. Madan boasts of was any thing of a stable nature, and was meant to be perpetual, it would certainly lead them to repeal the law, and not merely to suspend the execution of it.

If this law against those who declare their disbelief of the doctrine of the trinity is never designed to be executed, common sense will say that it ought to be repealed, and that it ought not to remain as a disgrace to our statute book
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any longer. While it is suffered to continue there, it will always be thought by us that it is intended to be carried into execution, though not at present, yet *at some convenient opportunity*. If I be absolutely determined never more to correct my child, and wish that he should *know* my resolution, I burn the rod. If I keep it, I certainly do it with the idea that some time or other it may be wanted. We Unitarians should never think that any proper *toleration* is intended for us, while a law, by means of which it is in the power of any man to persecute and punish us *as such*, shall remain unrepealed. And yet you see very clearly that the clergy, boasting of their mild and tolerating principles, would not fail to make as strenuous an opposition to the repeal of this law of king William, which makes it confiscation of goods and imprisonment for life, to declare our disbelief of the doctrine of the trinity, as to the repeal of the Corporation and Test acts. Though neither of them are in fact, of any service to their church at all, yet trembling at every shadow, and dreading they know not what, they are determined to oppose every thing that we apply for. Imagining, as it should seem, that we are much more *quick sighted* than themselves, they suspect that there is something more in any thing that we ask for than they are able to see.

Mr. Madan, quoting my *Letter to Mr. Pitt*, p. 26, endeavours to alarm you with our *farther claims*, when those we are now making shall be granted; and as he drops the quotation, he leaves you to imagine that those claims are absolutely *endless*, and might lead to the total ruin of the constitution in church and state. Now in that Letter, which I would wish you all to look into, I have distinctly marked what are *all* our claims as *Dissenters*, distinct from those improvements which I imagine might still be made in the laws relating to religion in this country, after every thing that we can wish for as Dissenters shall be granted. These are, first, admissibility to all civil offices at the nomination of the crown, the discretion of which we are not disposed to question; secondly, full liberty to profess, and teach,

teach, all our religious principles, without the fear of such laws as that of king William ; and lastly, to celebrate marriage among ourselves, as the Quakers are allowed to do.

Now this is the full extent of all our claims *as Dissenters* ; and what is there so very alarming in it ? And till these three articles be granted, our toleration is manifestly incomplete, because we remain exposed to civil penalties on account of our religious principles, which is the precise definition of *persecution*. And if all the three claims above mentioned were granted, your established church would stand not the less, but in reality the more, firm for it. Your church is guarded by its peculiar laws, and no person can derive any emolument from it, but those who submit to those laws, and subscribe to its articles. When we Dissenters shall ask for any thing that your church has to give, without submitting to its laws, or subscribing its articles, then, but not before, say that we are attacking the establishment. We do not desire the repeal of the Act of king William any farther than it respects ourselves. As the doctrine of the trinity is unquestionably an important article of *your* faith, let your clergy by all means be bound in the strictest manner to the profession of it. They receive their emoluments on that condition. But why should *we*, who do not receive those emoluments, be bound to *their* duty, or be subjected to *their* laws ?

Mr. Madan has thought so little on this subject, that he is not able to distinguish the claims of Dissenters as such, which would leave the church just as it is, from those claims which affect the very vitals of it. His confusion of ideas on this subject is evident in the following paragraph p. 21, “ The last pretended grievance which I shall at present notice (and perhaps it is the chief of their grievances) is the payment of tithes, and fees to the ministers of the church of England ; that is, the Dissenters complain that the provision which is appropriated to the support of those ministers who discharge the offices and duties of the religion of this country as established by law, may be reduced, and
“ withdrawn,

“ withdrawn, at the caprice of sectaries, for the support of “ nonconformists.”

To say nothing of the contemptuous language, unworthy of a gentleman, and a scholar, and much more of a christian, in which this paragraph, like the rest of the Sermon, is written, it is evident from the whole of it, that Mr. Madan mistakes the very nature and object of our complaints. While there is a religion so established by law as to be supported by any public fund, to which all shall equally contribute, the appropriation of that fund cannot be changed without affecting the established religion. If we *sectaries*, as Mr. Madan contemptuously calls us, demand that our proportion of the tithes be given to our own ministers, how equitable soever the thing may be in itself, it is nothing that we could ask as *Dissenters*. We, and others, members of the established church, may be convinced that such a measure as this would be reasonable in itself, beneficial to our country, and favourable to the interests of religion (as I shall proceed to shew that it would be) but then this is a speculation of a very different nature from any thing that concerns Dissenters as such. The whole body of them formerly, and a great proportion of them at present, approve of an establishment ; and since it cannot be that of their *own religion*, they think that the present may do as well as any other, and would even prefer it to that of many other Dissenters ; and therefore they have no farther wish than such a *full toleration* as Mr. Madan says they actually have, but which they find they have not, and which they would be very glad if he could procure for them.

In my opinion, however, and that of many others it would be much better for the country, and for christianity in general, if there was no such thing as any civil establishment of religion at all, but that every man should be left to provide for himself with respect to religion, using his own best judgment, as he does in things of a different nature. I see no reason why any one man should be compelled to pay for the *religion* of another man, any more than for his

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instruction

instruction in *grammar, philosophy*, or any thing else. But this I do not advance as a Dissenter, but on the principles of *political philosophy* in general. And that these principles of mine (though they are by no means peculiar to myself) which Mr. Madan would represent as infinitely alarming, have nothing in them at which you need to be alarmed, I shall clearly shew in my next letter, and let Mr. Madan, or any of your clergy, refute my arguments if they can.

Mr. Madan's *Sermon* being my *Text*, I shall think myself authorized by his example, to take the same liberties with it, that he has done with *his*, that is, to preach the very contrary doctrine. From a text which inculcates *meekness* and *forbearance*, and which discountenances all *evil speaking*, he has endeavoured to inflame your passions by the grossest and most absurd calumnies. The storm that he has raised I have endeavoured to allay, preaching the very doctrine to which his text should have led him, by endeavouring to remove those prejudices, which lead you to think ill of your neighbours, and thereby bring you to a better temper than that which he has manifested. I shall continue to do the same in the remaining Letters, and for this purpose shall go over all the articles that he has touched upon. But as a man may sow more weeds in an hour, than another can root out in a month, I must be allowed more *time* and *space* than Mr. Madan has taken; so that it may happen that a single sentence in his *Sermon*, shall give occasion to a long Letter of mine. But I shall not think much of my trouble in writing, provided you have patience to read; and I shall endeavour to write in such a manner as to put you into better humour, and make you feel more pleasantly, than you did after hearing Mr. Madan's *Sermon*. For the feelings of a man who is angry, though ever so justly, are never comfortable.

I am,

My good friends and neighbours,

Yours, &c.

LETTER

LETTER VII.

Of Religious Establishments in general.

My Townsmen and Neighbours,

I SHALL now bring before you a subject which, from the manner in which it has been generally considered, you may imagine to be of a peculiarly difficult nature, and to which your understandings are not equal. I mean the *connection between the church and the state*, or the use of *civil establishments of religion*. But notwithstanding this, I have no doubt but that I shall make it as perfectly intelligible to you, as any thing that I have yet treated of. I shall prove to you that those very principles which your superiors would have you take for granted, as *axioms*, or *certain truths*, on which they build others of very great consequence, have themselves no foundation at all, if either the *scriptures*, or *common-sense*, be your rule of judging concerning things.

Mr. Fox himself, who with respect to magnanimity, force, and comprehension of mind, is at least equal to any of our statesmen, and whose liberality of sentiment has led him repeatedly to defend the cause of the Dissenters in the house of Commons, still takes it for granted that there ought to be a civil establishment of religion in every country, thinking it, no doubt, absolutely essential to good government. But, great as Mr. Fox's abilities may be, he may not have given sufficient attention to this particular subject. Indeed, if he had, many doubts could not but have arisen in his mind with respect to it. The generality of Dissenters themselves as I have said, allow the propriety and use of some establishment of christianity, and formerly they were universally of this opinion, though it is contrary to a just and received maxim of theirs properly interpreted, viz. That *human*

authority ought not to be interposed in matters of religion, and indeed to our Saviour's own declaration, that his kingdom is not of this world.

If men are not to interpose their authority in matters of religion, they ought to refrain, not only from making *articles of faith*, and rules of *moral conduct*, to bind the consciences of men (which they allow to be within the province of God only) but they ought not to enforce any decrees of men respecting religion by *civil penalties*. For this is evidently setting up *a kingdom of this world*, and applying human authority to matters of religion, things with respect to which Dissenters hesitate not to say that every man should be left to himself, to be guided by the dictates of his own conscience, of which God is the only sovereign.

If I break the peace of society, if I injure my neighbour, in his person, property, or good name (things which human laws were intended to guard) I ought to be punished by those who administer such laws. But if I do any thing by which I offend *God* only, and not man, I should be left to the judgment of God, in this world or the next. These are very plain rules, and yet they are evidently violated whenever any body of men, clergy or laity, lay down rules respecting religion, and enforce them by civil penalties.

It follows from these plain principles, that whether I chuse to profess any particular mode of religion, or to have no religion at all, my neighbours and fellow citizens have no right to compel me. I do not molest them, and therefore they ought not to disturb me. If, therefore, I do not chuse to give any part of my property to the maintenance of religion, it does not concern *them*; and to compel me to pay money on a religious account, is real *injustice*, though sanctioned by law. The civil magistrate has the power of the stronger, and I, as the weaker, must submit; but it is on the same principle that I submit to an highwayman, or a robber, at whose mercy I necessarily am. He may say that he has a right to take my money, but he makes himself the judge, and to me his decision may appear unjust.

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If we interpret the scriptures by the conduct of the apostles and that of the early christians for three centuries, you will be satisfied that I do not carry this principle too far. In the New Testament you will find that, whatever any man gave to the support of religion, it was perfectly *voluntary*. The primitive church had bishops, deacons, and other officers, who, giving their whole time to the instruction, &c. of others, were maintained from the common stock; and the christians of those times must have been at great expence in building places of public worship, maintaining their poor, &c. But all these expences, great as they were, were defrayed by voluntary contribution.

It will be said that, in that age, there was no civil power that *could* be applied in favour of christianity. But neither our Saviour nor the apostles gave any directions about such a thing as *a civil establishment of christianity*, when christians *should* have the power of making one. And yet, as our Saviour distinctly foresaw, and frequently referred to, the universal prevalence of his religion, he must have known that it would be wanted, if that change in the external circumstances of his religion would authorize such a measure.

But what apprehension could the apostles have of the *use* of a civil establishment of christianity, when they found no want of it in their own times? Read all their epistles, and you will find no wish expressed by the writers of them, of any civil power to enforce the laws of Christ. Nay, without the aid of any civil power, christianity gained ground in the world, to the over-turning of the long-established system of heathenism, which was supported by that power. With what face, then, can any christian at this day say that civil power is *necessary* to christianity, when it never flourished so much as when it was entirely destitute of it, and opposed by it?

Christians should consider their religion as *disgraced* by any alliance with civil power. The voluntary zeal of the sincere professors of christianity would at this day, as well as in former times, supply all the funds which are really

wanted for the support of religion ; and if men offend against the laws of religion, they should, as our Saviour prescribed, and the apostles practised, be cut off from christian societies, and be considered as persons with whom they have no religious connexion ; but not punished by fines, imprisonments, or any civil inconveniences whatever, such as are the consequence of your excommunications. In this manner christianity is actually supported by all Dissenters, compelled as they are to bear their share in the support of a much more expensive system, by which they are oppressed.

It will hardly be said that the authority of the civil magistrate was necessary for the *appointment*, as well as the *payment*, of bishops, and other ministers in christian churches. For not only in the time of the apostles, but long after the undue interference of the civil power in matters of religion, it would have been thought an intolerable grievance ; if all christian societies had not had the free choice of their own ministers of every kind. But men who have been used to servitude of any kind, get in time a habit of acquiescence, and sometimes fancy that there is a real advantage in what is most disgraceful to them. Thus you are very well content to have no vote at all in the nomination of your own *servants*. For *ministers* of the gospel are no other than their title imports, being persons who are employed by christian societies for a certain stipend, to do a certain duty.

These are the pure and rational principles of christian churches ; such as we find in the scriptures, and in all the primitive times. But how have we deviated from them ; and in consequence of it, how has the church of Christ adopted the maxims of the kingdoms of this world ? Men have assumed authority, such as your church expressly avows, to *determine controversies of faith*. They have made numberless regulations about religion, and they have enforced the observance of them by fines, imprisonments, and dreadful punishments of various kinds, so that what is now called *the church* is as much a *kingdom of this world*, as *the state*.

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The great argument for these civil establishments of christianity is that religion promotes good morals, and that good morals are necessary to the well being of civil society. Now I am far from denying the usefulness of religion, and especially of christianity, in this respect; and on this account I have written so much (more, I believe, than any other person in this country) to prove its divine authority, and to explain its principles. But the friends of church establishments have made a great deal too much of this argument. Civil society has subsisted very well under all forms of religion, even the heathen ones. For the Roman empire was well regulated before the knowledge of christianity, yea better than several christian countries since. And christianity will operate in favour of good morals without being *established*, and even more so than when it is. The man who truly fears God, and believes a future state, will be a good moral man, and an useful member of society, though the prince and the state should not concern themselves about it. Nay he will be virtuous, when they are wicked.

Besides, though religion, or the belief of a God, a providence, and a future state, have its *use* with respect to society, it is not absolutely *necessary* for that purpose. Good laws, and a proper administration of civil government, will be sufficient to keep men from injuring one another. It is a common interest to restrain those vices which are injurious to the community, and the force of the community may easily be applied for this purpose. Only let there be a good legislature, good judges, and good civil officers (which the temporal interest of all states will provide) and you need not fear but that the internal peace of any country, which is the only proper object of civil government, will be sufficiently secured.

Great numbers of persons in this country, and many more abroad, are actually without religion. They believe in no God, or future state; they frequent no place of public worship, and they know no more of the Bible than they do of the Koran; and yet, with respect of *the peace of society*,
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they behave like other people, and are no more disposed to disturb others, than others are to disturb them.

Besides, there is no danger of mankind in general being without religion. Nay, I am well persuaded there would be much more of it without any establishment than with one; and *that* religion which men will voluntarily adopt and support, will have more influence on their morals, and be more favourable to the good of society, than any which any state will adopt and enforce.

Be persuaded, my countrymen, to think a little for yourselves, on this subject, as well as on every other in which you are interested, as the reformers from popery did before you, and consider not so much what you find *established*, as what is *right in itself*, and *beneficial to society*; and whether *innovations*, which your clergy dread so much, may not be *improvements*. Time was when christianity itself was an innovation. The reformation by Luther was a great innovation. At one time presbyterianism was established by law in this country, and then the introduction of episcopacy was an innovation. The Act of Toleration, which the clergy now think to be an honour to their church, though they were very much averse to the measure, was an innovation. The Corporation and Test Acts, which they now consider as the great bulwarks of their church, were originally nothing more than innovations; and if the repeal of them be an innovation also, there is nothing to be apprehended from the measure *as such*. Whenever things are got into a bad state, there can be no amendment without innovation; and surely you will not say that any thing *human* is perfect, and requires no *amendment*, that is, no *innovation*. Do not then partake of the fears of your clergy, who feel for themselves more than for you; and if you find *abuses*, either in the church or the state, have the good sense, and the spirit, to rectify them, without any dread of innovation.

The *constitution*, they tell you, consists of two parts, the *church* and the *state*. In fact, it consists of many parts, and the laws relating to the prerogatives of the king, the
privileges

privileges of the lords, those of the people, even those relating to the poor, to debtors, and to criminals, are as much parts of the constitution, as those relating to religion, and the clergy. There are as many parts of the constitution as there are different *objects* which government embraces; and why should any one of these be considered as more sacred, and exempt from innovation, than another?

But admitting for the present, that the constitution has but *two parts*, the *church* and the *state*; all that can be pretended is that they are equally sacred, and not one more than the other. But the clergy would persuade you that the church is infinitely more sacred than the other part of the constitution. It is a thing that must never more be touched by the hand of man, though it was as much the *creature of man*, as the state; and *this* requires continual alterations. For never a year passes without many acts of parliament calculated to reform abuses in the state; and abuses, we find, will creep in, let men do all they can to keep them out.

Formerly we had many acts of parliament to reform abuses in the church also. This part of the constitution, the liturgy, and the articles of the church of England, were not settled at once, but at different periods, and all by Acts of parliament. Your present hierarchy was not the immediate appointment of God, or of an angel, but the production of fallible men; and can you see nothing clearer than your ancestors, just emerging from the darkness of popery? In their most disadvantageous circumstances, had they the wisdom to settle every thing in such a manner, as that there should never more be any occasion for change or improvement?

Your church of England was not a thing that existed from the beginning of christianity. Our ancestors were all Roman Catholics, and at the time of the reformation had been so for many centuries; so that *Churchmen* are only *Dissenters* from the church of Rome. Now in this ancient and long established church of Rome (to which, according
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to Mr. Madan, you ought to have remained in quiet subjection to this very day) were many corruptions of pure christianity, which had been accumulating for ages; and some reformed churches corrected some of them, and others more. In like manner, we are Dissenters from your church; but we did not arrive to what we now are all at once. My ancestors did not teach me what I teach others; and I am far from supposing that all improvement will end with me. In all cases in which *men* determine, room should be left for the revision, and subsequent determinations, of other men, who may see farther than they do.

Supposing that at the same time in which your present ecclesiastical establishment was fixed, which was about two centuries ago, laws had been made to determine in what manner all houses should be built, grounds cultivated, and all manufactures carried on. Suppose that when public provision was made for an order of *clergy*, to take care of your *souls*, as it is called, an order of *physicians* had also been established to take care of your *bodies* (in which the state is certainly as much concerned) and that these state physicians had been obliged to administer certain prescribed medicines in all diseases; and the king and parliament who fixed your church establishment were certainly as well qualified to judge of matters of this kind as of those of religion. If this system had actually taken place, it is most probable that the great bulk of the nation, having been accustomed to these institutions, and seeing no others, might have applauded the *wisdom of their ancestors*, and might have exclaimed as loudly against all *innovation* in things *temporal*, as your clergy now do with respect to things *spiritual*.

The *state physicians* would certainly have been as much alarmed at any alteration in that part of the system which respected *them*, as the clergy have always been about things in which *they* are interested. They would have exclaimed that the *constitution* was in danger of being violated, if so much as a new medicine had been introduced; saying that if innovations once began to be made, no man could tell
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where they would stop; and that if so material a part of the constitution as that in which *medicine*, and the *bodily health* of all the subjects of the state should be changed, the whole system being settled at the same time, and being firmly compacted together, it would fall at once, and universal ruin be the issue.

This is the very thing the clergy are saying now. But, my friends, there is no more reason in *their* case at present, than there would have been in that of the *physicians* I have been supposing. As to the court, and the minister of the day; having had the appointment of these physicians, and having of course been served by them (as, for the same reason, they now are by the generality of the clergy, who must look up to the court for any great preferment) they would have found as good reasons for supporting the system which supported them, as Mr. Pitt can now find for the support of the church, and the continuance of the Corporation and Test Acts.

But when changes have begun to be made in things of greater or less consequence, and mankind are at liberty to make use of their reason, and consult their own convenience, they will soon find that, having had the experience of others before them, they will be able to do better for themselves than their wise ancestors did.

After the establishment of such a system as I have before supposed, if, in consequence of any great convulsion of state (for great and beneficial changes are seldom made without them) you had been at liberty to pull down your old wooden houses, and to build more convenient and elegant ones, of brick or stone, or whatever materials you pleased; if you had been allowed to make a few trials of new methods of cultivating your grounds, to diversify your manufactures, and to employ what physicians you pleased, giving them liberty to try new medicines, and new modes of treating diseases; you would wonder at your stupidity in bearing with the awkward and inconvenient system of your fathers so long as you did.

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Now, depend upon it, the very same will be the case when this old *church establishment* of yours, to which you have been so long attached, and which consequently many of you think so *sacred*, and so much *admire* (but which others of you, who have seen a little more of the world, I well know, begin to think looks rather *old fashioned*) shall be thought a proper subject of *examination*, and you shall be allowed to think and act for yourselves, as you now do with respect to your buildings, your grounds, and your manufactures. You will find that, with respect to *religion*, as well as other things, *wisdom did not die with your ancestors*, and that you yourselves will be able to do better than they did.

Let every parish be left to its own liberty, and every man give his tithes (or what shall be deemed an equivalent for them) to whatever christian minister he pleases; let him conduct your public worship in whatever manner you yourselves shall most approve; and let him be chosen, or dismissed, according to your own judgment of his character and behaviour, and you will soon have much better ministers, and much better religious services, than you now have; and you will wonder at your own stupidity, and that of your wise fathers, in going on so long as you have done, submitting to be guided and oppressed by others.

As to the different methods into which different parishes, or different parts of the same parish, might fall, you would soon find that there was no more reason why you should quarrel with one another about *them*, than about the different methods of building your houses, making your clothes, or any thing else that you now look upon with perfect indifference. Besides, as you would then see each others different methods in every thing relating to religion (and the state taking no concern in it, and not favouring one party more than another, there would be no improper bias upon your judgments) that mode which in time should appear to be the best would be generally adopted; and thus at length a better foundation might be laid for *uniformity*,

mity, if there be any advantage in it, than upon any other plan whatever. As to your rulers, who seldom think much about religion, for them to tell you what you are to *think*, and what you are to *do*, in order to go to heaven, where they have very little interest, is most impertinent. Let them content themselves with taking care of your interest in *this world*, and that is rather more than they are equal to, for they often make sad blunders, and bring you into greater difficulties than you would ever have brought yourselves. But as to *a world to come*, tell them that you will think more about it, than they seem to have any leisure, or disposition, to do, and that you will provide for yourselves as well as you can.

You will be told that the question of *the alliance between church and state* is of a deep political nature, and that you can be no judges of it. But in the same manner you are told that there are many deep mysteries in religion, and therefore that your clergy must teach you what to *think*, or rather what to *say*, about them. But be persuaded to think better of yourselves, and of your own understandings. These things are not, in reality, of so difficult a nature as many things in your common trades and businesses. The most important questions relating to *religion* are the plainest things in the world, and require nothing but a common understanding honestly applied, to comprehend them. The whole of the gospel was at first preached to the *poor*, persons of no education whatever, and therefore it must have been a very plain thing. Were not the apostles as plain men as yourselves, most of them having followed laborious and common occupations till they were considerably advanced in life, when they could not have been taught any thing very deep or mysterious? Indeed, all that they had to learn, or to teach, consisted of a very few exceedingly plain, but very important articles; as, if you will give me the hearing, I shall clearly shew you in the course of these Letters; and could they see the strange long *creeds* recited in your churches, and in the acts of solemn christian councils, they would

would not have been able to make any thing of them. The very terms in which they are expressed would have been unintelligible to them. And if they had been told that men would ever be required to give an unfeigned assent to such things under pain of everlasting damnation, they would have shaken their heads, and held up their hands, unable to express their astonishment.

As to the *use* of religion, or of church establishments, to any state, you are as able to judge of it as your governors. The only use of *government* itself is to enable men to live in society useful to one another, and without any apprehension of danger, either from persons of their own community, or those of others. The real use of *religion* to a *state* is only to promote good morals among the members of it, to remind you of your duty as honest men and good citizens, and dispose you to do good offices, and not ill ones, to each other. If you had been heathens, and had been obedient to good laws, and ready to defend your country against invaders, it would not have been the business of your governors to teach you christianity. If they had thought it to be true, they would have acted a commendable part in endeavouring, like other well meaning men, to convince you of its truth; but they ought not to oblige you to give salaries to the preachers of the new religion, whether you approved of it or not, and to lay taxes upon you in the form of *tithes*, or in any other manner whatever, for that purpose; because the end of civil society was already answered without it, since you lived in peace among yourselves, and were not disposed to molest others.

I have no doubt of the truth of christianity myself, and, as I have told you before, and you may see with your own eyes whenever you please, I have written more than any other person now living in this country to convince others of the truth of it; and the reason why I have taken so much pains to do this, is because I am convinced of the great value and use of it. I have also written a great deal to prove that that mode of christianity which I profess myself

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is preferable to any other, being more agreeable to truth, and better calculated to answer the great end of religion, which is to make men virtuous here in order to be happy hereafter. But what is of most use in christianity, that besides which every thing else is a mere trifle, is the belief that Christ will certainly come again to raise the dead, and judge the world, and to give unto every man according to his works; and this is what *all* christians believe. Consequently, with respect to the great *use of christianity to society*, there is no occasion for the state to give any preference whatever to one denomination of christians more than to another, because they all answer the purposes of government equally well; and they would do it still better if the civil magistrate would leave them to themselves, and give no preference to one more than to another.

This you see to be the case in fact. In this very town there are Churchmen, Dissenters of various denominations, Presbyterians, Independants, Anabaptists, general and particular; there are Catholics, Quakers, and Methodists, &c. You are told that this man is of one persuasion, and that man of another, and on a Sunday you see them going to different places of public worship; but you would never have found this difference in their common dealings, and in their lives. In general they are all equally sober, industrious, and well behaved; and if there be bad men, as there are in all places, they are not, in general, of one persuasion more than of another.

The only reason that can with any plausibility be alleged why the state should give a preference to one mode of religion rather than to another, is to prevent *confusion*. But is this confusion worth preventing at the price that must necessarily be given for *uniformity*? For notwithstanding all that the state can do for any one particular mode of religion, many people will think for themselves, and many will prefer another. Of course, they will be offended by any preference given to others, to which they will think themselves equally entitled. For the sake, then, of distinguishing one
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set of subjects, no better than the rest in a civil capacity, all the rest must be disgraced, at least, if not subjected to cruel persecutions, and compelled to support what they do not approve. Now this is certainly a great *evil* in a country, subjecting great numbers of persons to real hardships, and it ought to be great *good* indeed, that can counterbalance it.

But, on the contrary, if you examine all the evils that must necessarily arise from civil establishments of religion, you will find that, for the sake of preventing an evil of the most trifling nature, and which, after all, never can be prevented (for in the established church itself there are persons who, if they think at all, will think very differently, and though they submit to authority, will do it with much reluctance) evils of a most serious nature are introduced, viz. the greater or less oppression of many members of the state, generally the most conscientious men in it; because, notwithstanding the hardships to which they are exposed, they chuse to dissent from the established worship. And, what ought to concern every body, the establishment of religion is necessarily attended with a great *diminution of public liberty*. For the civil governor, by favouring the religion of some of the subjects, and discountenancing that of others, acquires a source of corruption and influence which would not otherwise be open to him. If the teachers of the favoured religion be of his appointment, and if they must look up to him for any considerable emolument, he will certainly, if they be *men*, command their services, and thereby secure to himself more power than the good of the whole requires.

These are unquestionably great and serious evils; and if nothing but the real *use* of a religion to a *country* was considered, and not the interest of the *court* and of the *ministry*, which is generally opposite to that of the people, you would not hesitate a moment to decide against the system.

Perhaps you will understand this subject, of the real use of religion to a country, a little better by considering the state of your town of Birmingham in this respect. There are in it five places of worship for members of the church of England,

England, and fourteen for the different classes of Dissenters and Methodists. Of about seventy thousand inhabitants, it is not supposed that more than five thousand attend any place of public worship on any one day, so that perhaps not much more than twice this number, that is ten thousand, attend any public worship at all, or can be said to *have*, or at least much to *value*, any religion. On the whole, it is pretty clear, from the best accounts that I can collect, that there are more persons attend public worship in this town *out* of the established churches, than *in* them. Consequently, of the seventy thousand inhabitants of this town, sixty-five thousand (including the five thousand who have some religion, and the sixty thousand who have none) are compelled to pay a very great annual sum, to support the religion of the other five thousand. Now, is there any natural reason, or equity, in this? And do these five thousand, who do not pay a tenth part of the expence of their own religion, behave better, as citizens, than the other five thousand, who, besides paying for their own religion, pay much much more towards that of their neighbours? Or do they behave so much better than those who profess no religion at all, as to make it worth the while of the community at large to be at that expence for *them*? Were all the inhabitants left to their free votes, there can be no doubt but that the sixty-five thousand would bid the five thousand pay for their own religion, if they chose to have any. Consequently they are taxed and oppressed to serve a minority. If those who attend public worship more or less, be estimated at twenty thousand, still as more of this additional number worship *out* of the churches than *in* them, the great majority will be made to pay for the minority.

As to those who conscientiously worship God in places which Mr. Madan contemptuously calls *conventicles*, they certainly behave as well in society as those who frequent the *churches*. Few or none of the criminals whom you are continually carrying to Warwick ever belong to any of our societies, and we seldom trouble you with our poor. Look

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into your jails and workhouses, and you will find very few Dissenters in them. Instead, therefore, of being treated with contempt and insult, as we continually are by such preachers as Mr. Madan, we are intitled to your thanks ; as our religion, which teaches us to behave so well, and be so little burthensome to you, not only costs you nothing, but as we contribute our full share to the maintenance of yours.

In fact, you members of the church of England are, in the eye of reason, greatly in debt to the Dissenters. If what we have given to the support of your religion from the time of the establishment of it were reckoned up, it would amount to a very great sum ; and that this is *a debt*, which ought to be repaid, is most evident, because it is *money advanced by us for your use*. If this sum was repaid, as in equity it ought to be, it would supply all the expence of our religion for centuries to come.

You will say that you are under no obligation to do this, because what we have paid for your benefit was by Act of parliament. But can an Act of parliament authorize a manifest injustice? And when you are taxed with oppressing your neighbours in exacting of them that for which you have given them no equivalent, will it be sufficient, at the great day of judgment, to say that you had an act of parliament for doing it? They were acts of parliament that authorized the burning of Protestants in bloody queen Mary's time. But will those acts of parliament justify Bonner and Gardiner, and other popish bishops and popish statesmen, who promoted that horrid persecution? You do not believe that they will. And if so, neither will any act of parliament, passed before or since that time, excuse you in the sight of God, for exacting of any man more than, in the eye of reason and equity, he ought to pay. If an act of parliament will not justify the taking men's *lives*, neither will it justify the taking their *money*.

Whatever, therefore, you may think about this matter, the church of England, as a body (without considering the cruelties inflicted upon the Dissenters during all the reigns of
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of Elizabeth, James I. Charles I. Charles II. and James II.) stands a debtor in the book of God's account to the Dissenters, for their proportion of tithes, for whatever has been exacted from them for the repair of churches, and for every other expence from which the Dissenters as such derive no advantage. And yet, instead of contributing to the expence of building or repairing our meeting-houses, in return for what we do for yours, you think you do us a great favour in permitting us to build them with our own money, and that we are allowed to live peaceably among you, promoting the good of the country, by our industry and sobriety, which in general are conspicuous and exemplary.

This you call *toleration*, and make a mighty boast of it, as if it was a great *favour* that you do us, and much more than you are obliged to grant. But thus many other *debtors*, instead of paying what they owe, abuse their *creditors*; and many more would do it if an Act of parliament would clear them, and authorize their insolence. Acts of parliaments, to be sure, can do wonders. They can make and unmake kings. They changed the established church of England from popery to protestantism, and they can change it from protestantism to popery again. Acts of parliament can alter your liturgy, and from a *trinitarian*, can make it an *unitarian* one. They can abolish *tithes*, and order that the salaries of the clergy, like those of civil officers, be paid out of the public treasury. They can reduce the emoluments of some livings, and by that means raise the value of others, so that every man's salary would bear a just proportion to his duty. And such things as these, which the parliament can do, if you were unanimous in petitioning for, you would certainly have.

But there are some things that king, lords, and commons cannot do; and as they cannot make *white black*, nor *black white*, so neither can they make vice to be virtue, or virtue vice. Consequently, they cannot make that to be *honest*, which, in the eye of God and of reason, is essentially *dishonest*.

An act of parliament may give all my property to my next neighbour, without alleging any reason for it, and I, having no power of resistance, must submit. But in that case, would not king, lords, and commons be as great rascals as a highwayman who should do the same thing in the same arbitrary and violent manner? Do not then depend too much upon acts of parliaments, especially in matters of religion. In all things of this nature obey *God* and not *man*. Consult the dictates of your own natural reason and conscience, and then you need not fear what man can do unto you.

If all who really labour in God's great *harvest*, and especially those who *preach the gospel to the poor* (who stand in the greatest need of instruction) were to receive their wages, in proportion to the real use of their labours, out of the tithes, and other public funds, from which the clergy are now paid for doing (or rather for *not* doing) the same work, it would be no small sum that would go out of their pockets into those of the *methodist preachers*, who have civilized, and christianized, a great part of the uncivilized, and unchristianized part of this country. But if they be not recompenced out of *that fund*, they will be recompenced out of *another*, something more permanent. When *this great globe, and all that it inherit, shall dissolve*, I had rather be found in the company of such humble labourers in God's vineyard than in that of the generality of your dignified, and beneficed clergy, *who have had their good things in this life*.

From the veneration with which Mr. Madan would inspire you for *civil establishments of christianity*, and the abhorrence and contempt with which he treats *Dissenters*, you would naturally imagine that such establishments of christianity have been from its first promulgation, and that our mode of religion is quite an *upstart thing*; whereas the very contrary is well known to be the truth of the case. In every article in which we differ, our system is the antient one, and yours modern.

What

What is it that distinguishes Dissenters from the members of established churches? They are the following particulars, and no other whatever. They chuse and they pay their own ministers, without burdening the state with any expence on that account. They also dismiss their ministers whenever they are dissatisfied with them, and they acknowledge no authority in any man, or in any body of men, to settle articles of faith, or rules of discipline for them. In all these things they judge and act for themselves, holding themselves to be answerable to God and their own consciences only.

These principles are common to all Dissenters, though we differ much from one another in other things, and in all of them we differ from established churches, like that of England. Your creeds and forms of public worship are dictated by acts of parliament. Your ministers, at least most of them, are appointed either by the king, or particular patrons. You have only a right to complain in case of their misbehaviour, but without any other controul over their conduct. You have no power either to chuse, or to dismiss them, and their incomes are fixed by the law; so that whether you approve of their services, or not, they can enforce the payment of their dues, *to the uttermost farthing* by a regular well known course of law. They can levy a distress, and throw you into prison, for the non-payment of tithes, as well as for that of any other debt.

Now all these things are comparatively of late date in the history of christianity, and they took place not all at once, in consequence of any proper *alliance with the state*, which is entirely a fiction of modern times, but one after another, as circumstances were favourable to the clergy. For they, like other bodies of men, never lost sight of their interest; and the ignorance and superstition of former times were exceedingly favourable to them.

When the emperors became christians, they gave power to the bishops, whom they were then disposed to favour, to enforce the decrees of their councils, with respect to articles

of faith, and points of discipline. But the church funds, from the voluntary contributions of christians, being sufficient for the purpose of them, they made no farther provision for the support of the clergy. They only shewed their piety, as other rich individuals did, by building churches, making presents of plate, and vestments, and grants of lands to some of them. By their example they encouraged these donations, and thus the church grew rich, and was supported by its own proper funds, as any other corporate body might be.

But the emperors never interfered in the choice of bishops, till the bishops of Rome becoming very wealthy, and from their peculiar situation having great power, the emperors assumed a negative on the choice of the people, though there is hardly any example of their making a real use of it. They seldom or never presumed to recommend any particular person antecedently to the choice of the people. In the appointment of the ordinary bishops and clergy they never interfered at all, directly or indirectly.

When, upon the irruption of the northern nations, and the establishment of the feudal system, churchmen got possession of *estates in fee*, those estates were subject to the same laws as if they had been held by other persons. And as the bishops and abbots had no natural *heirs*, the princes bestowed them, at least the *temporalities*, as the estates were called, on whom they pleased. By this means the greater bishops and abbots became temporal lords, and in consequence of this obtained a right to sit in the great council of the nation, along with other peers of the realm. But this did not better the condition of the ordinary clergy, or provide for their maintenance by law.

Tithes, by which they are now legally maintained, took place very gradually, and were first given voluntarily, sometimes to the poor, and sometimes to the church, at the pleasure of the donor. By degrees, however, the clergy excluded the poor, and appropriated all the tithes to themselves; and about A. D. 600, tithes, from being established

as a *custom*, became in some instances *legal rights*; because many estates were bequeathed with an obligation to pay tithes to particular churches. When tithes were left to distant churches, the priests of the parish in which the estate lay used to complain; and at length, but so late as the reign of our king John, the pope made a law that all tithes should be paid to the parish priest; and after some time they were levied by law, in all parishes without exception*.

Thus you see that this boasted establishment of yours, venerable, as you think, for its *antiquity*, is in fact but of *yesterday*, and derives its being from a succession of *innovations*, all of them departures from the genuine principles of christianity; and all together they form a system of which the apostles could not have had any idea. On the contrary, all *our* customs are exactly those of the primitive church, and such as were universal in the christian world before any establishment was known.

I am,

My good friends and neighbours,

Yours, &c.

* There was much more reason for an universal tax upon the kingdom to support religion in former times, than there can be at present. But the *times*, or circumstances of things, change, while the *institutions*, to which they gave birth, continue. When this tax was imposed, there was no other religion then *one* in the country. At least, avowed *sectaries* were very few; and as the particular inconvenience of tithes was not then attended to, and all derived what they deemed to be a benefit from the establishment which was supported by them, no person complained. But now the case is widely different. Great numbers are so far from deriving any advantage from the established religion, that they are oppressed by it, and yet they are compelled to support and enforce that oppression. They have, therefore, great cause of complaint; whether there be any sense of equity in the nation to attend to the complaint or not.

LETTER VIII.

Remarks on what Mr. Madan has observed on this Subject.

My Townsmen and Neighbours,

MR. Madan represents the cause of churchmen, in opposing the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, as a *great constitutional cause*, and this, he says in his Preface, is the chief motive for the publication of his Sermon. But be assured it is constitutional only with respect to *the clergy*, and not to *yourselves*. For it is only a power of compelling you to pay them for what instructions they are pleased to give you, and to pay them in the most burthensome manner possible; which often operates to defeat the end of all their instructions, and which leaves you no controul upon their conduct, whether you approve of it or not. This, indeed, is the case of almost all establishments; but it is evidently a diminution of your liberty, and an augmentation of their power. It is, besides, an insult upon you, as it implies that, if you were not thus compelled to have such a religion as the government provides for you, you would have none at all.

But in the primitive times, religion, and the maintenance of it, were, as I have shewn, voluntary things, and the compulsory payment of tithes, &c. (of which no hint is given in the New Testament) introduced the tyranny of the clergy, and the oppression of the laity; and this kept increasing, till, at the time of the reformation, no tyranny was ever so dreadful. The heathen emperors themselves never carried on a more bloody persecution than did christians who had power against other christians who had no power, and all for the support of an antichristian hierarchy. And all that was done in England by Henry VIII. and queen Elizabeth, was setting up another hierarchy in its place. Mr. Madan, however, quite forgetting the primitive and apostolic state of things,

things, in which all persons were perfectly free to support their religion in whatever manner they pleased, says, p. 6, "the indispensable necessity of some national church," (that is, a church to which men are compelled to contribute) "is so clear in itself, so capable of abundant proof, that it may be rather affirmed as an axiom, than offered as a proposition." Indeed, it is much more easy to *affirm* this, than to *prove* it; and in fact, the very reverse of what he affirms as an axiom, may be demonstrated from the *New Testament* (to which such a constitution is altogether unknown) from *the nature of things*, and from *actual fact*. But Mr. Madan, taking his axiom for granted, says, p. 7, "every state and its national church have a mutual connexion, and a reciprocal interest." But here the *national church* means nothing more than the *national clergy*, and not the *christian people* of which that church consists. For *your* interests, as I have shewn, are sacrificed for *theirs*.

The assurance with which churchmen continually repeat their favourite maxims, without the least regard to the actual state of the world, which is a standing refutation of their assertions, is astonishing. Thus Mr. Madan says, p. 7. "what civilized state was ever known permanent and flourishing, unconnected with some system of religious tenets." To say nothing of this maxim being equally capable of being urged in favour of heathenism, mahometanism, popery, or any system of religion whatever, Mr. Madan certainly never thought of America, when he wrote his Sermon. For that country has been *permanent* and *flourishing* for near two centuries, without any such system, as he imagines to be *absolutely necessary*. In many of those provinces no man was ever compelled to pay to the support of any particular species of religion approved by the state: for the state left every man to chuse his own. And in Pennsylvania, which, unfortunately for Mr. Madan's hypothesis, was from the first, and ever continued to be, the most flourishing of them all, no man was compellable to support *any* religion, and yet there never was any want of religion, or of good morals, in that province.

All

All the states of America are now in the same situation. They have no national religion at all. In that respect every man does *what is right in his own eyes*, and all persons, without distinction, are admissible to every civil office; and yet they see no cause to apprehend that ruin and destruction which Mr. Madan forebodes will be the consequence of the dissolution of *our* national establishment. Since their emancipation from the power of this country, the North Americans are imitating our civil institutions, and adopting a form of government similar to our excellent one; but they wisely avoid every thing like the *ecclesiastical part* of it, as the clergy always affect to speak.

If these establishments of christianity were so *necessary*, as Mr. Madan represents, the American States could not have subsisted a single year without one; and in the late unsettled state of their civil government, when the ecclesiastical constitution was certainly, as Mr. Madan himself would say, most wanted, they found no want of it at all. They have now done without one, in a state independent of England, fourteen years, and for any thing that appears, they may do as well fourscore, or four hundred, years. Now, why may not Englishmen on this side the Atlantic do without a *national church* (this appendage, or rather excrescence, of our constitution) as well as Englishmen on the other side of it?

To subdue your minds to a disposition to submit to every thing that you find *established*, and to oppose all *innovation*, Mr. Madan brings into one view, p. 14, all the passages in which the apostles urged submission to the Roman government in their time; without considering the peculiar situation of christians at that time, and without considering that his application of those maxims would inculcate submission to *every* government, however tyrannical, that happens to be once *established*, be it heathen, mahometan, or popish. If the *powers that be are ordained of God*, was not Henry VIII. guilty of a great sin in resisting them? For certainly he found the power of the pope as fully established in this country

country as the present hierarchy is now. According to this, it would be a sin to resist *any* government. But is not this strange doctrine? Would it not even shake your belief in the Bible itself, if you saw that this slavish and absurd tenet was really contained in it? It might do very well as a Bible for the Turks, but ought to be rejected with indignation by Englishmen.

Another text that Mr. Madan quotes as an argument against all innovation, is Proverbs xxiv. 21. *My son, fear thou the Lord and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change.* But would not this have been a much better text for cardinal Pole before the Reformation, than for Mr. Madan after it? He means by this quotation, and on the authority of Solomon, to give you a bad impression of us Dissenters, as a people that are continually *restless*, and *given to change*, whom nothing reasonable can satisfy; whose demands, therefore, are never to be regarded, but who are always to be kept under by proper authority. But what are all the changes that *we* propose, compared to that great change in consequence of which Mr. Madan now enjoys the valuable livings of Ipstock and of St. Philip's, in Birmingham, and a prebend at Lichfield, besides being chaplain to the king, and having by that means, no doubt, some much more considerable preferment in prospect. If he really condemn *all* changes, he must condemn that of the reformation from popery; and then he ought to resign his livings, and become a *catholic Dissenter*, with a salary of twenty or thirty pounds a year. If he did not mean to condemn *all* changes, why did he quote this text without explanation or limitation; and if *some* changes be proper and lawful, why may not *others*?

If Mr. Madan expounds the scriptures in the usual course of his Sermons no better than he has done in this, by putting together a number of texts in an arbitrary manner, without any regard to their connexion, he may lead you into many strange mistakes. He may tell you from the scriptures, that *there is no God*, for that sentence is found
there

there (Psal. xiv. 1.) and after giving an account of Judas hanging himself, he may add from the scriptures, *Go thou and do likewise* (Luke x. 37.) Without some comment, or at least the *context* (or what goes before and after any particular sentence) the mere *words of scripture* give you no solid instruction, or safe direction. Though the apostle does say, as Mr. Madan quotes, p. 14, *Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers, for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*, Mr. Madan himself, in another situation, would no more preach obedience to *all powers that be*, than he would advise you to hang yourselves. Do you think that he would approve of obedience to Oliver Cromwell; and would he say that it would have been unlawful to depose *him*? And yet his power was at one time, to all appearance, as well *established* as that of the church of England at this day, of the permanency of which, I own, that I now begin to have some doubts.

If Mr. Madan mean that we should explain the text above mentioned by what immediately follows, and which in this case he has honestly subjoined, *For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil*, and that this power is *the minister of God for good*, allowing us to judge for ourselves, whether it be good or not, his argument for submission is impertinent; because we shall then be required to submit to no government but what we ourselves are convinced is a *good one*, and therefore shall be at full liberty to resist whatever we conceive to be a *bad* government, or such as we see does not answer its proper end. This Mr. Madan could not but have seen; and therefore, if he have any meaning at all, that is to his own purpose, he must mean that all governments that we any where find actually established are good ones.

What extravagant things the advocates for establishments can say, we see in Mr. Madan's Note from *Wollaston's Religion of Nature*, p. 25, "Were it not for that sense
" of

“ of virtue, which is principally preserved, as far as it is preserved, by national forms and habits of religion, men would soon lose it all, run wild, prey upon one another, and do what else the worst of savages would do.”

This was written many years ago, when every country had an established religion, and therefore *a sense of public virtue* might, with some plausibility, be ascribed to it. For since both existed together, one of them might appear to be the *cause* of the other. But Mr. Madan has seen more, and he ought to have reflected on what he had seen. He might see that in America men do not lose all sense of religion and public virtue, by losing an establishment. The people of that country do not *run wild, prey upon one another, and act like the worst of savages*. Mr. Wollaston could not see much of this. At least he might say, that, though there was no proper establishment of christianity in America, yet that the people of *that* country were more or less controlled by *this*, in which there is an establishment of religion. But Mr. Madan might have seen America independent of England, and though without an establishment, as virtuous as this; but he has turned his eyes another way.

A man may as well say that the rising of the sun, or the falling of the rain, is owing to ecclesiastical establishments, as that a general sense of religion, and of virtue in a country depends upon them. They are, I doubt not, great obstructions to true religion, and the cause of much of the *infidelity* of the Great at the present day. What is most *conspicuous* in religion, is, of course, that which is *established*, and what is established they see to be *absurd*, and therefore they make no farther inquiry about it. They conform to it in public, but laugh at it in private. For the sake, therefore, of religion, and public virtue, I wish to see an end of these corrupt establishments; and I shall not fail to do the little that may be in my power towards accomplishing this great and most desirable end.

I am, &c.

P. S. Having

P. S. Having, in the two last Letters, considered *establishments in general*, I shall in some future Letters, take a view of that of the *church of England*, so highly, and for such good reasons, admired by Mr. Madan, whose *Alma mater* it is. After this I shall proceed to give an account of those turbulent *sectaries*, and that *dæmon of heresy*, which seems to have terrified him so much, and by which he prays, p. 24, that *our unrivalled constitution may not be contaminated*. And perhaps, in his animadversions on this part of my correspondence, he may be pleased to explain in what manner it is that *dæmons do contaminate* such things, as well as how they may be *shaken by dissension*. In the latter, I suppose he alludes to some danger from *within*, and in the former to something from *without*.

Perhaps, on a nearer view than Mr. Madan has yet had the courage to take, this *dæmon* may not appear quite so hideous and frightful a thing as, from a distant view, it appears to him. However I will shew you what this *dæmon* really is, and then you may judge for yourselves. The fight shall not cost you much, nor will the exhibition take up much of your time. As to myself, I shall attend you with pleasure, and as I shall go very near it, you will see that it does not actually *devour* all that come in its way. If you fear being *contaminated* by it, at first only *look* at it, and be careful not to *touch* it. But really you will find this same *heresy*, to be as gentle, clean, and harmless a thing, as a young lamb, and no frightful, *contaminating, dæmon* at all.

You may safely venture to approach and stroke it. It has neither the fierceness of the *tyger*, nor the filthiness of the *hog*; if it was this *unclean animal* that gave Mr. Madan the idea of its *contaminating* property. If it was suggested to him by the account of the *unclean spirits* in the history of our Saviour and the apostles, let him, and let the rest of the clergy, prove their genuine *succession from the apostles by casting them out*. According to Mr. Madan, the number of *persons possessed* is of late much increased, and therefore, if *they can do any thing* (Mark ix. 22.) in the business, they should

should exert themselves, and that *soon*. As to myself, Mr. Madan, I imagine, will conclude that I have within me not less than a *legion* of these unclean spirits, *cum justo equitatu* (he will understand me, and in his next Sermon explain it to you.) But let him, and his brother exorcists, take care lest, by proceeding incautiously in this business, the possessed should cry out, as in Acts xix. 15, *Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are ye*; and thus some mischief should arise to themselves, and their system, in consequence of the attempt.

This day, I observe Mr. Madan is to publish *one final reply* to these *Letters*, including, no doubt, these which he has not yet seen, and those which I have not yet written, as well as the former. As I do not pretend, to such a gift of *second sight*, I must wait till I have an opportunity of seeing his performance; and as I find by his second advertisement, that it is to be a Letter addressed to *myself*, you may depend upon my reading it, and giving you all the information I can concerning it. Having begun this correspondence, I do not mean to close it very soon. I have been *slow to speak*, but having long forborne, now that I am urged to it, by Mr. Burn and Mr. Madan, I shall not stop till, as Pope says,

——— I've pour'd out all myself, as plain
As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IX.

Of Mr. Madan's Letter to the Author.

My generous Townsfinen and Neighbours,

AS I promised you the best account that I could give you of *Mr. Madan's Letter to me*, and you will presume that before this time I must have perused it, you will naturally expect to know my opinion of it; and I will tell you in a few words. It is a very angry one, intended rather to hurt me, than to instruct you; and after all, as I shall clearly shew you, is nothing to his proper purpose, which was the vindication of himself from the most injurious and unjust aspersions of a large body of worthy men and good citizens.

He was charged with representing the principles of the Dissenters as *inimical to government*, and therefore, as unfit to be trusted in any place of profit, or power, even at the nomination of the crown itself; and he has neither retracted, nor sufficiently vindicated, his accusation. He has hardly so much as noticed, or hinted at, those of my arguments in vindication of myself and my brethren, to which it behoved him most of all to have particularly replied; so that he had much better have written nothing at all.

To judge from the tenor of the Letter itself, Mr. Madan's object in it was the same with that of Bishop Horsley, and Mr. Burn, viz. to discredit me, and throw an odium upon my character, that you might not think it worth your while to look into any of my writings, or regard any thing that I might say. And that is certainly the shortest way with me, and the most effectual, next to *hanging me up*, to which Mr. Madan alludes in his Note p. 47, and collecting and burning all the copies of my publications, which might prove a troublesome, expensive, and uncertain business.

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As I have been much used to such charges as Mr. Madan brings against me, and sometimes amuse myself with them; and as they appear to most advantage when *brought together, and properly disposed*, I have collected the different parts that Mr. Madan has given of his delineation of my character, that you may see *at once* what kind of person it is that is addressing you, and be upon your guard accordingly. If Mr. Madan had done the same, it would have better answered his purpose, which was that of deterring you from reading my publications; but being a young writer, he might not be sufficiently aware of the effect of sentiments properly *concentrated*. Behold then, my friends, and neighbours, who it is that, according to Mr. Madan, writes these Letters.

I am infected, he says, p. 1, with a *cacoethes scribendi*, or an incurable itch of writing. "Controversy," p. 34, "is necessary to my support, if not to my existence" (and yet I was near forty before I wrote any controversy at all) "I am perpetually immersed and floundering, in the troubled waves of controversy*." I deal in "low wit-ticisms," p. 38. I am actuated by "a blameable and blind impetuosity," p. 41. Notwithstanding my "artful misrepresentations and virulent invectives," p. 41. I am "a passionate and disappointed assailant," p. 39. I am "an evasive Proteus," p. 17. I deal in "unjust invectives, and unfounded assertions," p. 37. My "blindness is wilful," p. 27. My "perversions artful," p. 23. I am even "skilled in the art of misrepresentation," p. 5, so that I might be able to teach this art to others. I have recourse to "the deliberate misrepresentations † of an old and subtle

* If there be any thing of a *stifling* nature in these muddy waters of controversy, it is a miracle that I survive so long as I have done. I fancy Mr. Madan supposes that I have the nature of a *fish*, or at least that of a *frog*, or perhaps he would say a *water serpent*.

† Bishop Horsley not only calls *me* a wilful liar, but also the great Origen, the most eminent christian in all the early ages, because his account of things does not correspond to his views of them. He says, in a manner as solemn as that which Mr. Madan adopts, to make you believe that the Dissenters in general are rebels and hypocrites, that he

"polemic, whose only settled principle is that of litigation," p. 39, and to complete the whole, the motive that actuates me is nothing less than "malevolence," p. 35. The result of all this is, that my "censure is innocent calumny," p. 38. Such is my obstinacy, that I "never acknowledged a single mistake," p. 38; and yet he describes me, p. 47, as "an avowed wanderer in points of the first consequence, where uncertainty is at present dreadful, and "where error would in future be fatal*;" quoting what I have said of my frequent change of opinion, and having *no fixed creed*, in my Letter to Dr. Price.

As Mr. Madan says, in his *Sermon*, p. 9, that "few will say it was written with an uncharitable and unchristian temper†," as well as that what he delivered was from "the settled principles and conviction of his heart," he would, no doubt, say the same concerning his account of of me in this *Letter*. You see, therefore, who it is you have to do with, and if you read any farther it is at your peril. You have fair warning both from Mr. Madan and myself. Well may he say, p. 34, that I throw out "unhandsome and unnecessary sarcasms against characters at least as respectable as my own, and which I most illiberally introduce into my Letters." For if this picture be a just

would not take either my evidence, or that of Origen, upon our oath. To call their adversaries *wilful liars* seems, therefore, to be a clerical fashion. But do not you, my good neighbours, imitate your spiritual guides in *this*.

* In my last Part only I acknowledged four errors in the preceding, and all who are acquainted with my writings (which Mr. Madan is not) well know that no writer has more frankly acknowledged so many. How can I "wander from one opinion to another," with which Mr. Madan himself charges me, without, virtually at least, owning the opinion that I abandon to be an error. The *fatal error* that Mr. Madan here speaks of must be my disbelief of the doctrine of the trinity, the necessary consequence of which, according to the Athanasian creed is, that I must *without doubt perish everlastingly*. But the scriptures say that hereafter all will receive according to their *works*, not their *opinions*.

† This reminds me of what is reported of the old duke of Marlborough, who said, that whatever faults he had, his enemies could not charge him with *ambition* or *avarice*. The duchess (who knew him much better than he knew himself) said she was obliged to bite her lips when she heard him say it.

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one, and if I *do* throw out sarcasms against *any person*, it must be a character much more respectable than my own. For being possessed of such *powers* as he ascribes to me, and actuated by such *malevolence*, I can be no other than *Satan* himself. A Bishop in Ireland, as I have been credibly informed, very seriously maintained that I was *antichrist*, and that my experiments on air were those *prodigies* that he was to exhibit. But even *this* is short of the tremendous idea that Mr. Madan exhibits of me. Woodward

You will naturally ask what foundation Mr. Madan can have for charges of so serious a nature as these, especially that of *wilful misrepresentation*, and perversion of his meaning. He gives two instances of this, and I will mention them both, that you may judge how so very heavy a charge is supported. When I quoted him as saying that the "Dissenters were under no disability, which could possibly be avoided, consistently with our security," I added, as thinking it to be his meaning, that of the *church*, whereas it appears that he referred to the *state*, or the *civil government*. But how did the insecurity to the *state* arise, but through *the church*, which he supposed to be connected with it? Now, will this authorize the violent exclamations quoted above? It is not, in fact, any misrepresentation at all; and certainly it is far from having the appearance of a *wilful* one.

The other instance is my inadvertently speaking of the corporation act as following the test act *, whereas it preceded it, when it was of no consequence at all to my argument which of them was the first. But so high an opinion does Mr. Madan affect to have of my *knowledge*, and so little of my *integrity*, that he says, p. 26, "I feel it justly due to your acknowledged learning, to confess, that when I see any blindness in any point of history, I much suspect it to be wilful." This mistake I was soon sensible of, and corrected, as you will see in the third Part of these Letters.

* This was in the first edition of one Part of these Letters.

Now the most notorious liar must have some *motive* for violating truth; and in this case there could not be any at all. Mr. Madan often says that, "when I consider what *"I have written I shall be ashamed of it;"* and I hope that *he* will be ashamed of *this*. I am very far from supposing him to be so destitute of all moral principle as he makes me to be; but, like many others, he has been misled by popular opinions concerning my principles and character; opinions which, if he would read my writings himself, even my controversial ones, he would find to be void of all foundation.

Mr. Madan charges me with want of respect to *himself*; when all that I have said by way of disparagement of him, amounts to nothing more than that he is a young man, ignorant of some points of history; and even in this he might perceive I was not serious; meaning only that he had been *inattentive* to them, and did not properly apply them. I also hinted that his imagination was a little disturbed. But this applies to the whole body of the clergy; and what less can any man, in his sober senses, think of those who really apprehend the safety of the church and state to be in imminent danger from the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, which I clearly demonstrated to you, could not do any harm to either? Yet Mr. Madan can say (Sermon p. 11) that this repeal would be "opening the constitution to the interference of the Dissenters, and eventually trusting to their moderation;" as if upon this every thing would be in our power, though the king, the ministers of state, the nobility, and almost all the members of parliament, should continue to be of the establishment. Can this be any thing less than insanity?

As to Mr. Madan himself, I could give him sufficient evidence of the real respect with which I once considered *him*. But this, I own, is much changed since the publication of his Sermon; though he is by no means sunk so low in my esteem as I am in his, when he says, p. 35, that in viewing me, he "experiences a mixed sentiment of pity
"and

“and contempt, pity for such a degradation of my talents, “and contempt for such a proof of my malevolence.” Now I consider him as a person of *ability*, not at all inferior to what he is pleased to ascribe to me, and of a naturally ingenuous and good disposition, but miserably misled by high church prejudices ; in consequence of which he has hastily taken up a business to which neither *his* talents, nor those of any other man, are equal. I have, however, so good an opinion of his *candour*, as to be persuaded that, after some time, he will see these matters in a very different light from what he does at present ; and if, when he is perfectly cool, he would read even my controversial writings, he would entertain a very different opinion both of *them*, and of *myself*, than he does at present.

Notwithstanding the frightful picture Mr. Madan gives of me, he says, p. 6, that he can “meet me, except in the “light of cavil and disputation, not only with civility, but “with pleasure and good will.” I hope, therefore, that he was not perfectly serious in what he has said of me. For if I knew any person of such a character as he describes mine to be, I should certainly never wish to meet him at all. I should always suspect him of some mischievous intention or other, and be continually in dread of his power. After such a picture as he has drawn, I should naturally look for the horns, the tail, and the cloven foot, as proper accompaniments of the character. Nay I should not chuse to have much to do with any person who considered *me* in such a light ; conscious as I am to myself, that my character and conduct are very different from what he conceives them to be.

I am, &c.

LETTER X.

Of Mr. Madan's Apology for his Treatment of the Dissenters.

My Friends and Neighbours,

MR. Madan is willing, in his second publication, to soften, in some measure, his censure of the *Dissenters in general*, as persons of a turbulent disposition, seditious, republicans, and king killers, by repeatedly asserting that he only meant the *chief leaders* of the party. But the expressions that he particularly quotes, as most liable to suspicion, are those of the *Resolutions of the district meeting at Leicester*, which were by no means the language of the *heads of a party*, but were approved, and unanimously adopted, by a very large body of Dissenters, of all denominations, in no less than nine contiguous counties. These *Resolutions* he has annexed at large to his Sermon, by which he certainly did not mean to give any favourable idea of them.

Now these Resolutions are exactly similar to those that were passed in all other parts of England; so that any censure of *them*, must necessarily apply to the great body of Dissenters, and not to a few only. We do not thank Mr. Madan for excepting *some individuals* among the Dissenters from his virulent accusation of the whole body, because it is well known there are no large bodies of men without some well disposed individuals; and I appeal to the whole town, and to Mr. Madan's own hearers, if the impression left by his Sermon was not in the highest degree unfavourable to *the whole body of Dissenters*, and therefore whether it was not deserving (considering his justly respected character) of particular and indignant notice. However, his charges appeared to me so very absurd, that I treated them, as you have seen, rather with ridicule, than with anger; whereas

whereas though his Letter abounds with *wit*, yet *anger* evidently predominates in it.

Upon the whole, I cannot help comparing Mr. Madan's conduct to that of a boy*, who should wantonly thrust his stick into a hive of quiet and industrious bees, and then think to walk off unhurt; not recollecting, that, inoffensive as they naturally are, they have *stings*, and are capable of resentment. Had he caught a few single bees by themselves, he might have crushed them without alarming the rest, and without any risk to himself at all. He does not, however, deny but that he alluded to *myself* in particular, as one of those more *violent Dissenters*, on whom his censure was *intended* to fall; and if he really took me to be that *malicious Being* above described, he should not have trodden upon my *clowen foot*, or have kicked me so near to my tail, without remembering that I had *horns*, and he had none.

Besides, who are the violent Dissenters that Mr. Madan refers to, and how far can he be justified in ascribing their particular sentiments to the whole body of Dissenters? My own sentiments, especially my religious ones, which are all that are concerned in this case, have been no where so unpopular as among the Dissenters themselves; and what Mr. Madan will not suspect, but what I know to be true, they gave the greatest offence to those who are commonly distinguished by the appellation of *rational Dissenters*; and it is only of late that the case has begun to be a little otherwise. At one time there were not more than two or three pulpits in England that I considered as open to me.

* Mr. Madan will perhaps construe this as a reflection upon him, on account of his *youth*, since he thinks, p. 20, that I meant something *contemptuous* by mentioning that circumstance both with respect to Mr. Pitt, and himself before; whereas any impartial reader will see that I had no idea of the kind with respect to either of them. It is true, however, that I do not see any thing so *transcendant* in the *abilities* of Mr. Pitt, as Mr. Madan does, p. 20, nor have I at present the favourable opinion that I once was willing to entertain of his *heart*, because I do not think that his *conduct* in his high office sufficiently corresponds to his *professions* before he arrived at it.

With

With respect to my political publications, my late *Letter to Mr. Pitt* greatly displeased the Dissenters in general; and many of my own particular friends, those whom I have reason to value the most, have not yet forgiven it. But my whole history shews that it has not been my custom to court popularity, even among the Dissenters, much less to aspire to the emoluments, as Mr. Madan insinuates, p. 22, of the established church. If I did, my conduct has been ill adapted to gain my end.

As to the late application to parliament, I had nothing to do in suggesting it, and very little in promoting it. Nay, apprized of my extreme unpopularity, it is well known to all my friends, that I purposely kept out of the way, lest my presence should impede the business. All that I ever thought of doing was delivering the *Sermon* on the 5th of November last. And a discourse on some topic relating to *public liberty* being always expected on that day, and the usual topics of that kind being pretty much exhausted among us, I thought I might as well make choice of *that* subject, as any other; and when I sat down to write, I was far from having any thoughts of publishing the discourse.

If Mr. Madan would have proved my real principles to be dangerous, he should have considered what I have written without a view to controversy, on the subject of *government*, especially my *Lectures on the Study of History and General Policy*, which I particularly pointed out to him. There he will find the principles that I taught when I was tutor at Warrington, those that are now taught at the new college in Hackney, at Northampton, and as I am informed in the colleges in North America. If Mr. Madan had looked into those Lectures, which, from the circumstances above mentioned, he may suppose bid fair to contain such *principles of government* as will generally be taught to young men of fortune among us, he would have found them, indeed, to be favourable to *liberty*, but unfavourable to *republicanism*; and all my acquaintance know that I am even a zealous friend of a *limited monarchy*, such as our constitution is.

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In a conversation I had last summer, at which Dr. Jackson, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, was present, I maintained the importance of *three* different powers in every well balanced state, with so much earnestness, that, with great good humour, he and the rest of the company rallied me, as being a *trinitarian in politics*, though an *unitarian in religion*. On this question I always took the part of Mr. Adams against Dr. Franklin, who was a favourer of a republican government; though even *he* was so well satisfied with our own, that I (who knew him well, if any man did) know that he would have sacrificed every thing for the preservation of it.

I scruple not to say that I think the *power of the crown* to be at present much too great; but this does not affect my idea of the real use of a *king*. I am an enemy to the *hierarchy*, not only as *antichristian*, but as a great means of giving the crown the undue influence it now has; in consequence of which the court can carry almost whatever measures they please.

While the clergy had a leaning to the Pretender, which continued till there were no more hopes of his succeeding to the crown, they served as a balance to the power of the crown? but, now they are wholly with it, and the influence of the Dissenters, which in all the late reigns was intirely with the court, has begun, in consequence of a series of unprovoked discouragements, to turn the other way, though still it is not generally so.

I am sorry to find Mr. Madan approving of the *Extracts* that were made from the *preface to my Letters to Mr. Burn*, and that "he thinks himself and the public, p. 12, indebted to the ingenious editor of them, as forming a neat syllabus of my constitutional principles;" and speaking ironically, "a summary, yet full, evidence of my many public merits." For by keeping out of sight every thing that shewed I had nothing in view besides *public discussion*, that editor, and his abettors, must have meant to insinuate that I intended something of a more violent kind. For what is there alarming
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in merely advancing any *opinion*, and the *reasons* on which it is founded. Are not the clergy at full liberty to answer those reasons? Was it worth their while to trouble every member of the house of Commons, and all the bishops, with an account of my wishing only to *reason* with them on the subject? Will the clergy seriously say that they are afraid of my *arguments*, and as much terrified at *them*, as they would be at *real gunpowder*?

Mr. Madan ridicules, p. 16, our attempt to plead a precedent for "our district meetings, our national meetings, "and our common funds, from the admired system of that "peaceable set of men, the Quakers." "But I believe," he says, "every body will smile at an example so totally "inapplicable to your present subject. Your farther reading, it is true, may perhaps induce the next change of "your principles to coincide with those of that respectable "fraternity, and I heartily wish it may."

Now, should not Mr. Madan have shewn in what respects our conduct has differed from that of the Quakers? But it is much easier to *assert* and to *calumniate*, than to *prove* a charge. I have clearly shewn you, that our conduct does not at all differ from that of the Quakers, and our public papers shew that from the first we had their conduct in view. In a letter of Mr. Walker's, which was circulated with a view to promote our late proceedings, copies of which were printed here, and sent to all parts of England, is the following paragraph, "The example of the Quakers, "of whose union this plan is almost an exact counterpart, is "a complete answer to every objection that can be made to "this intention, and this mode, of consolidating the communion of Dissenters through the kingdom." The compliment Mr. Madan pays the Quakers, is evidently meant to be at our expence, which is nothing but a poor *artifice*, to engage them on his side, against us. But I know that body of men better than he does. I know that they wish well to our application, and I do not despair of their openly joining us when it shall be renewed.

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I am particularly sorry to perceive that Mr. Madan is not ashamed of retailing the low scurrility of Swift. "Your virulent abuse," he says, p. 35, "of the writings and memory of Dean Swift, cannot fail to return with increased force upon yourself; and his character is above your reach." Now I said nothing about his *writings* and *memory* in general, but of his *illiberal prejudices* against the Dissenters; and that I am not singular in treating *this* part of his character with contempt, Mr. Madan may see in the last Monthly Review, which I now have in my hands, in which the following censure is passed on the late republication of the Dean's Tracts on the repeal of the Test Act, p. 343. "Dean Swift's hatred to the Dissenters is well known; and all calm and dispassionate men are of opinion, that his hatred urged him even to gross defamation. We are sorry, therefore, to see the present controversy on the Test Act *thickened* by throwing into the cauldron any of his illiberality and virulence."

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LETTER XI.

Of Mr. Madan's farther Arguments in Support of his Position that the Principles of the Dissenters are unquestionably Republican, and of the Decision of the House of Commons against the Dissenters.

My Townsmen and Neighbours,

AS Mr. Madan promised *one final reply* to all these Letters, you would naturally expect that it would have been an *effectual one*, so as to leave nothing of any consequence to add to it. Now, in order to this he should not have

have contented himself with looking for the principles of modern Dissenters in those of the time of Charles I. but have examined our *late conduct*, and the principles that we *now teach*. For admitting that we did put to death one king in the middle of the last century, we may have repented of it before the conclusion of this. Now it does not appear that we made any attempt upon the life of William III. queen Ann, George I. or II. or that of his present majesty. Nay, the Dissenters entered into no conspiracy against Charles II. or James II. And as their loyalty to the princes of the house of Hanover stands unimpeached, it ought in reason to be concluded that, in their proceedings against Charles I. they did not consider him merely as a *king*; for then they would have had the same dislike to *all* kings. Mr. Madan therefore, in his *final reply*, should by all means have answered this argument, which I very particularly urged against his maxim that *the principles of the presbyterians* (meaning those of the Dissenters in general) *are unquestionably republican*.

He ought also to have replied to my argument from the Scots (who always were, and still are, Presbyterians) never having shewn any predilection for a republican form of government, but having always had kings, and a proper attachment to them. But though he intimates, p. 26, that he *could* have explained this remarkable fact consistently with his accusation of *all* Presbyterians being of course republicans, he leaves you to guess at what he might say; and I am sure it is not in my power to divine what it could be. Warburton may give what reasons he pleases for allowing the Scots to retain their presbyterian form of church government; but the attempt to force episcopacy upon them in the time of Charles II. proves that it was a measure of *necessity*, not of *choice*.

But though Mr. Madan says nothing in reply to my objections to this doctrine, he still maintains his own, viz. that the principles of Presbyterians, both in the antient and modern sense of the word, are unquestionably republican; and
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in proof of it he now alleges, p. 26, the case of Holland, Geneva, and that of other foreign Protestants, whose principles he supposes to be presbyterian, and whose governments are republican. But in the same manner he might prove that the principles of the Catholics are republican. For in Switzerland there are as many popish cantons as protestant ones. Also, the religious principles of the natives of Holland and of Geneva are materially different from those of the Dissenters of this country: If *they* be Presbyterians, the French Protestants are so too, and can Mr. Madan shew that *they* ever discovered a leaning towards a republican government?

Even the Lutheran church may be said to be presbyterian, since its constitution approaches much nearer to this system, than to that of the church of England. The circumstance that particularly distinguishes Presbyterians from the members of the church of England, is that the latter are governed by *diocesan bishops*. But among no foreign protestants are there any bishops with such powers as those in England. They do not there rank with the nobility, so as to have seats in the supreme council of the nation; and they have no such *temporal courts* (very improperly called *spiritual*) as, to your sorrow and cost, you often find they have here. The Lutherans, however, though in fact Presbyterians, compared with Episcopalians in this country, are not republicans; but have always acquiesced in the government of the empire, and have submitted to the laws of it, as much as the catholic subjects.

On the whole, Mr. Madan's favourite idea of the natural connection between the principles of *religion* and those of *civil government*, on which he charges the Dissenters with being republicans, is altogether unsupported by any facts in history. He might just as well infer that because his next neighbour was both a presbyterian and a button-maker, that therefore all presbyterians were button-makers, or all button-makers presbyterians; as because the people of Geneva, or any other particular state, are republicans and presbyterians,

presbyterians, that therefore all other presbyterians are republicans. As, if he walk through this town he will find button-makers of all religions, so if he step beyond the territory of Geneva, he will find republics composed of zealous Catholics; and Mr. Madan himself will hardly say that the principles of the Catholics are *unquestionably republican*.

Mr. Madan, a little conscious, perhaps, that his arguments from *present facts*, and *past history*, such as we usually call *arguments a posteriori*, have but ill served his purpose, has recourse to a new and very curious argument *a priori*; inferring *facts* from *principles*; and in the following manner he argues that republican principles *must* at this day exist among Dissenters, notwithstanding all the changes which he allows to have taken place among us since the time of Charles I. "*Parties*," he says, p. 24, "change every day" but *principles* are a long-lived generation. Where then," says he, p. 28, "are the principles of some of the leading characters who sunk again into the general mass when the Restoration happily took place." I ask him the same question. Let him find them if he can. Only I will say they are not among the Dissenters. Where are the principles of the violent Anabaptists in Germany? I do not believe that they exist *any where*; and yet according to Mr. Madan they *must* be somewhere. Besides, if these republican principles do exist among the Dissenters, they cannot affect the great body of them; for the king-killers in the time of Charles I. were very few.

But if there must be republican and king-killing principles among the Dissenters, must there not, for the same reason, be the principles of *passive obedience and non-resistance* among the clergy; since they did exist, and were far more general among them, and in a very late period too, than republican principles ever were among the Dissenters? And, in consequence of this are not the clergy as much to be dreaded, because friends to *arbitrary power*, as the Dissenters are for being too great friends to the *liberties of the people*?

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With respect to the *Corporation and Test Acts*, Mr. Madan thinks his reasoning against the repeal of them, on his principle of the Dissenters being republicans, and therefore unfit to be trusted with power, to be confirmed by the late decision of the House of Commons in his favour. Of this he makes so great boast, by repeating it so often, and with such an air of triumph, that I fancy he begins to think it the best argument that he has to produce. "It would be idle," he says, p. 5, "impertinent and ridiculous, to refute any arguments from his pen, after so deliberate a decision for the third time, from the collective wisdom of our present representatives in parliament." He considers the propriety of what he had urged, p. 9, as "established by the late most decided majority of the house of Commons." But had this been the *three fold cord*, of all the three estates of parliament, as in this case it is only a *single one*, there are many examples of such cords being broken. For how often have acts of parliament been repealed?

I wonder however, that recent facts should not have taught Mr. Madan how little force there is in his arguments from acts of parliament, or rather the decision of one house, or both houses. Did not the high church party boast as much as they now do of the great strength of their cause, when the house of lords, at the instigation of the bishops, rejected our petition to be excused from subscribing to your articles of faith? As they afterwards relented, whether they changed their opinion or not (and indeed it is most likely that *that* remained the very same) this may be the case again. Many circumstances may occur to induce the members of the house of Commons, even without their thinking any more about the matter, to vote exactly contrary to what they have lately done; and then what will become of Mr. Madan's great argument? His cause will then want its chief support. Whereas my reasoning, as you see, is altogether independent of acts of parliament; and therefore

therefore I am not at all less confident of its strength on account of the late decision. For the members of the house of commons in this case were not influenced by *reason*. Let *her* voice be once heard, as in time it cannot fail to be, and their opposition to our just claims will cease.

As Mr. Madan lays much stress on arguments from *authority*, I will inform him of one with which he is probably unacquainted. The Dissenters have not only been defeated in the *house of Commons*, but in the *Royal Society* also. A friend of mine was lately recommended to this philosophical Society by myself, Mr. Kirwan, Mr. Watt, Dr. Crawford, and Mr. Watson. His knowledge of philosophy and chemistry far exceeds mine, and I entertained no doubt but that a certificate *so signed* could not fail to be successful. But, as my information goes, "the king's two librarians, and "many church dignitaries came to vote against him," and he was rejected, even by a majority of the votes, when one third would have been sufficient. Unfortunately, he was known to be not only a friend of *mine*, but to have been active in the measures to procure a repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, and was sent to London as a delegate from the Dissenters in a northern county. Had my own election been depending, it would certainly have met with the same fate. I will venture however, to say that, had the clergy looked through the three kingdoms, they could not have found an abler man to put an affront upon. It therefore shews, what is much to Mr. Madan's purpose, the superiority of those who oppose the repeal of the Acts in question over those who desire the repeal, not only in the *house of Commons*, but even in the *Royal Society*.*

* In my first account of this transaction my information was not quite correct, and some are of opinion that my friend was rejected for some other reason than I first conceived. But let any impartial reader judge, whether an attestation of *philosophical merit*, by Mr. Kirwan, Mr. Watt, Dr. Crawford and Mr. Watson (to say nothing of myself) all men of science, and several of whom were known to have been acquainted with the candidate several years, could be treated as this was, without some *manœuvres* originating in party, *political* or *religious*?

On the idea of the claims of the Dissenters being *unjust*, and their principles unfavourable to the constitution of this country, Mr. Madan now justifies the very harsh epithets he gave us in his Sermon, and also because "in the scriptures themselves," as he says, p. 20, "many strong accusations are alleged against evil doers." He adds that they are, "expressions of reproof, which are warranted by truth, and required by necessity." Now, my good neighbours, they who are called *evil doers* in the scriptures, are *wicked men*, or persons of immoral lives, and not men of unsound political opinions. Whether, therefore, Mr. Madan can be justified in applying the same, or similar language, in cases so very different as these are, do you judge. Every history will shew you that there have been very many virtuous men engaged in actual rebellions, from mistaken principles of policy. But surely, though these persons are justly condemned by *men* in this world, they are not liable to the wrath of God in the next, which will be the certain doom of all those whom the scriptures call *evil doers*? It is happy for us Dissenters that we are not at the mercy of Mr. Madan, either in this world, or the next. He may sentence all Dissenters, and all Unitarians, to the fate of evil doers hereafter; but I hope he will not find any *power* to put his sentence in execution.

On the subject of the Corporation and Test Acts, Mr. Madan makes a long quotation from bishop Horsley's pamphlet, recommending it to my particular notice. Now I have read it, as I have done many other things of this same bishop, with much more attention than I have found they deserve; and I see nothing worth notice in it. All that Mr. Madan has quoted from it goes upon the idea that the Dissenters must be enemies to the state, because they are enemies to the church. But we are so far from allowing this consequence, that we are rather disposed to maintain the direct contrary; thinking the principles of the church to be in opposition to those of the state, as a free and equal government, and giving the crown a very undue
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degree of power ; a subject on which I shall probably enlarge in the course of these Letters.

Bishop Horsley should not have written about the Dissenters till he had known them better than he does, and Mr. Madan should not have copied after him, till he had read what myself, and others, have replied to him. He quotes the bishop (Sermon, p. 28) as "having fully proved" that the genuine Calvinists among our modern Dissenters "are very few." Now, if he had read what Mr. Palmer of Hackney, and myself, have repeatedly replied to him, he must have been satisfied that no assertion was ever more unfounded. This town of Birmingham alone is an abundant refutation of his confident assertion.

There is no place, I believe, in England where the Dissenters who are *not Calvinists*, are so numerous in proportion to those who *are* as here. But in this place there are but two congregations that are not professedly calvinistical, besides a very small one of General Baptists ; whereas there are three congregations of Independants, or proper Calvinists, two of them numerous, and a fourth is forming ; and there are two of Particular, or Calvinistic Baptists, one of them very numerous. In most other places, and especially in London, the Calvinists exceed all the other Dissenters in a much greater proportion. It is, I believe, lessening. But great bodies of men do not change their opinions so soon as the bishop's argument required ; and hence his obstinacy in not admitting so evident a fact.

Mr. Madan, as well as the clergy in general, take it for granted, that I am *smarting*, as he says (Letter, p. 5) under the lash of this bishop. This is only a proof that he has not read my last *Defences of Unitarianism*. There he would see that this bishop's blows, so far from being those of a *whip*, or any thing that can give *pain*, are only those of a *feather* which tickles and amuses me, and that it would gratify me, and all Unitarians, very much to have a few more of them.

If a general pretend to have gained a *victory*, you never take his own word for it. You ask for the *trophies*, the
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slain, and the *prisoners*. Now it is evident that there has been a very great increase of Unitarians since the commencement of our controversy, and that it has been in a great measure occasioned by it. I may venture to say that it has been thirty fold. It is an increase acknowledged by all, and greatly lamented by the Trinitarians. Now is not this more the sign of his *defeat*, than of his *victory*?

I will venture to say that every publication on the part of the Trinitarians, has been the occasion of the diminution of their party. An anonymous correspondent tells me that, "by accident, nay, he says, from the singularity of "the circumstance, by the direction of God, he met with "my *Letters to Mr. Burn*, and that if it had not been for "them, he might have been glorifying God the Son, and "God the Holy Ghost, which he now thinks not to be "founded on reason, or scripture." Many others, I have reason to think, are under the same obligation to Mr. Burn, and many, I doubt not, will have reason to thank Mr. Madan, and these Letters of mine, to which his *Sermon* has given occasion.

In this very critical state of things, would it not be wisdom in the bishops, the natural guardians of the church and its doctrines, to interpose, and not suffer young men to engage in this important controversy, lest they should do more harm than good to the cause they wish to support? Injudicious friends often do more hurt than open enemies.

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

Of the Ecclesiastical Constitution of Ireland.

My Friends and Neighbours,

THE pretences for *civil establishments of religion*, which were the subject of some of the preceding Letters, have not always been the same, but have changed with the times. For if a thing *must* be supported, and one buttress is found to give way, another must be provided to supply its place. Now till of late years it was always maintained to be the duty of the civil magistrate to support the *cause of God*, and *of truth*, without any regard to the *numbers* that might be for or against it. But as *all* religions were maintained to be *true*, and therefore this maxim would furnish a pretext for continual hostility (the partisans of each pretending to fight in the cause of God) it has of late years been held by all the friends of these establishments, that they are to be supported not because they are founded on *truth*, but because they favour the religion of *the majority* of the inhabitants of any country. Consequently, they acknowledge that, if a majority of the inhabitants of any country were Mahometans, Catholics, or Presbyterians, *these* ought to be the persons favoured by the state; and that, in order to preserve peace, all the rest should be *tolerated*; meaning that as many privileges should be granted them, as shall be necessary to keep them quiet.

Now it so happened that the establishment of Ireland was settled before this *new principle* was thought of. At least, no regard was then paid to it. For the great majority of the people of Ireland are Catholics, and yet the establishment is that of the church of England, the members of which are not so numerous as even the Presbyterians. To
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defend the establishment of Ireland, therefore, on the new principle of the established religion being that of the *majority*, is evidently impossible, and yet the old principle of establishments has been long given up; and as the attention of the clergy has not been called to the subject, they are utterly at a loss what to say about it. Since, however, I have started the subject, Mr. Madan seems to have thought it incumbent upon him to say *something*; but (perhaps, not having exactly settled his own judgment) it is not easy to develope his meaning.

"Should you be disposed," he says, p. 34, "to argue that by the same mode of reasoning, the number of Roman Catholics should establish popery in Ireland (because the majority are Roman Catholics) you must first prove the pope to be a member of some protestant sect of christians." From the turn of this curious sentence, it should seem to be intended for *wit*, or *humour*; and, as such, it may, for any thing that I know, have great merit; but what I am looking for is *argument*, and of this, as Mr. Madan has not thought fit to explain himself, I do not find the faintest trace. And as this is unfortunately his *final reply*, we must guess at his deep meaning as well as we can. For my part, I must own myself to be entirely at a loss. I cannot even imagine on what principle the establishment in Ireland ought to be protestant when the people are Catholics; but such as would make it equally proper that the established religion of Scotland should be episcopalian, when the people are Presbyterians; or that the establishment in England should be presbyterian, when the majority of the people are Episcopalians.

If there be any *act of parliament* (for such things it seems are *reasons* with Mr. Madan) which makes it wrong to establish the popish religion in Ireland, it must be unjust, and ought to be repealed, as well as every thing else that is *violent* and *tyrannical*. For what is an act of tyranny, but that which is forced upon a people against their will? And were the people of Ireland fairly polled upon the subject of

establishing some system of religion, the votes would certainly be in favour of the catholic, and not that of the church of England.

Suppose a catholic prince, the late pretender for example, should by an armed force expel the present reigning family, and in all the forms of an act of parliament, establish the popish religion in this country, should we not pronounce this proceeding to be tyrannical; and such as ought to be resisted, whenever we should have the power of doing it? and should this be deferred till we had "proved the pope to be a member of some protestant sect of christians?" Should we not laugh at such a proposal? Such, therefore, must be the case of the people of Ireland. But when any system is *established*, and a particular set of men derive advantage from it; be it ever so contrary to reason and common sense, it will *by them* be supported, as this is by Mr. Madan. There can hardly be a more evident case of the kind than this, of the church establishment of Ireland being protestant, when the great bulk of the people are Catholics.

If the people of Ireland were fairly at liberty to determine for themselves, as all men, and all nations, naturally wish, and have a natural right, to do, they would never submit to maintain at the public expence a system of religion that was professed by not more than one in ten of the inhabitants. But if not more than one in an hundred were Episcopalians, the present system would, no doubt, be continued; and for the same reason, whatever it be, this might be the case even if there was *not one*. For in a great number of the parishes in Ireland there is not a single protestant; and yet all the tithes go to the maintenance of the clergy of the church of England, who have nothing to do for it. This is a crying enormity, and public injustice; and it is poorly palliated by Mr. Madan's saying with a sneer, that it cannot be remedied till the pope become a member of some protestant communion. It is adding mockery and insult to oppression.

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As Mr. Madan's reasoning is so manifestly inconclusive on this and all other subjects which he has touched upon, or glanced at (for he has done nothing more either in his *Sermon* or *Letter*) and I have so clearly pointed out the inconclusiveness of his reasoning, you may wish to know upon what *principle* he makes himself so easy about it. It is, p. 36, because I have charged the apostle Paul with inconclusive reasoning; as if it was enough for him to be put upon a level with Paul, even in what is faulty in him. But whether I be right or wrong in thinking that Paul may have sometimes reasoned inconclusively (and he himself does not pretend to be exempt from error) will this be any justification of Mr. Madan? May I not be wrong in censuring Paul, and yet right in censuring the rector of St. Philip's. He will hardly pretend to inspiration. If he do, he should give some proof of it. This, however, he threw out not by way of *wit* or *argument*, but merely *artifice*, to prejudice you against my reasoning, as if because it has no force against St. Paul, it can have none against himself.

Another stroke of artifice in Mr. Madan is his insinuating, p. 18, that I have a low opinion of your understandings. But if that had been the case, should I have thought of addressing these *Letters* to you, so as to submit to your judgment important articles of *religion* and of *government*, with respect to which I and Mr. Madan hold different opinions, making you the umpire between us? I cannot consider the *aggregate body* of any town, Birmingham or London, as consisting of persons of learning or education; but they have not, on that account, the less good sense, or the less capacity of judging on such subjects as I am bringing before you.

Your judgment and good sense were never so much called in question as by your clergy, when they made the violent opposition that you have heard of to the introduction of my publications on theological subjects into the public library in this town, when the funds of it were amply sufficient for the purpose. The pretence was that

would not have your minds disturbed with these subjects; as if you were not qualified to read and judge for yourselves, and at the same time preserve your good temper with respect to those who should think differently from you. This, however, was only a pretence, and a very shallow one. They wish you not to read or think on these subjects at all, lest you should entertain opinions different from those which are established, and which it is their interest to keep up; and in consequence of this, lest their *system*, and *themselves*, should eventually be disturbed, and not *you*. But I trust that, in defiance of them, you will shew the free spirit of Englishmen, and that you will think and act for yourselves, following *truth* wherever you find it, and respecting it alike, whether it be discovered in a church, or in a conventicle.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIII.

Of Controversy.

My good Friends,

MR. Madan says, p. 45, that I have “disgraced my “talents” which he is pleased to call (whether ironically or not, I cannot tell); “*superior*,” to unworthy and disgraceful purposes, and he desires me to “remember “the higher point of view in which my profession as a “*minister* has placed me.”

With respect to *this*, let Mr. Madan inquire of my congregation. They will inform him, that I never trouble them with discourses of a political nature, except on a fifth of November, and then never say any thing that tends to exasperate them against their neighbours of the establishment, but to make all due allowance for the prejudices of their education; whereas Mr. Madan’s Sermon, which
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has been observed to inculcate no christian virtue, was delivered on a *Sunday*, which ought to have been devoted to better purposes.

The greatest part of my theological publications are of a serious nature, enforcing the evidence and doctrines of christianity; and those of which Mr. Madan speaks with abhorrence and contempt, viz. my *controversial writings* (with which he is evidently very little acquainted) are in my own opinion, calculated to assert and vindicate very important christian truths; and I do not know that I can employ whatever talents I may have to a better purpose. With what *success*, or with what *spirit*, I have written, I do not appeal to Mr. Madan, but to *you*.

Besides, is the person who is wantonly attacked always to be charged with a *love of controversy*, when he defends himself, and his writings, and not rather the person who wantonly attacks him? Mr. Burn, for example, charges me with *undervaluing*, and *rejeeling*, the *testimony of the apostles concerning the person of Christ*; when all that I have written on the subject, has been to support what I take to be their testimony. He also charges my theological principles in general, as "big with all mischief." This he does in the place where I live, and before the congregation to which I preach. Am I then to be blamed if I repel with the indignation that it deserves, such unmerited and unprovoked calumny?

Besides, my controversial writings bear but a small proportion to the rest of my publications. I do not think all my controversial writings, properly so called, that is, those in which I reply to *particular persons*, would make so many sheets as I have printed this very year of works of a different nature. But controversy, as far as appears, makes the whole of Mr. Burn's and Mr. Madan's publications. Theirs also are both on the *offensive* side, whereas mine are wholly *defensive*. Indeed, there is nothing of any consequence that I have written in this way but what was as unpremeditated, as my replies to Mr. Burn and Mr. Madan.

What

What has contributed the most to get me the character of a *controversial writer*, is what I have written in defence of myself, when attacked from a great variety of quarters, on account of my *Disquisitions concerning Matter and Spirit*, and my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*. I should never have written against bishop Horsley, any more than against Mr. Burn, if he had not first written against me. I have not answered to one challenge in ten that has been given me. If I do *flounder*, as Mr. Madan says, in the muddy waters of controversy, he and Mr. Burn are among those who first tempted me in, by plunging in before me, and keeping me company as long as it was convenient to them, and yet they now insult me for it.

But I do not desire to make any apology for what is called *controversy*. For, how offensive soever the term may be to those whose principles suffer by it, it means nothing more than *public discussion*, without which no question of consequence can be thoroughly, and generally, understood. The apostle Paul was a great controversial writer, and so was the meek St. John; all his epistles being written against the Gnostics.

Besides, how can I escape blame in this case? If I make no reply, I am said to be *unable* to make any; and if I do, I am *fond of controversy*; so that my situation resembles that of the old man and the ass. Do what I will, I must displease some. Mr. Madan, you see, challenges me to answer a pamphlet written by bishop Horsley, about the Test Act, which he speaks highly of, but which I think undeserving of any particular notice. On the whole, I have thought it most manly, and most favourable, to the cause of truth, after avowing any opinion of importance, to discuss it publicly with such persons as appeared to me the best qualified to do the contrary opinion justice, and to continue the discussion till nothing of consequence remained to be said on either side, that the public might judge for themselves on which side the truth lay. This I think is far better than, like Mr. Madan, to throw my dagger, and then run away from the person

person offended by it. However, it is by no means true that I have always had the *last word*. My rule has been to cease to write when I had nothing material to add to what I had advanced before. I could name many persons to whose last publications I never made any reply.

Mr. Madan, you see, binds himself to make no reply. But as bishop Horsley made the same imprudent declaration, and afterwards violated it, so may *he*; and if he see it to be in his power to reply with *effect*, I doubt not but we shall have some *more last words of Richard Baxter*. Do you think that if he, or Mr. Burn, irritated as they evidently are, had any hope, either of silencing me, or of convincing you that I *ought* to be silent, they would not do it? Has either of them spared any thing to injure me in your opinion? You well know they have not; and it is not probable that their disposition is changed in this respect.

I am, &c.

Of the Principles of the Church of England.

LETTER XIV.

My Townsmen and Neighbours,

ONE of the preceding Letters that I took the liberty to address to you, related to *church establishments in general*, in which I shewed you that in forming them the civil magistrate went beyond the bounds of his proper province, and incroached upon that of Christ, and of God himself, to whom alone we are accountable for our religious principles and moral conduct; and yet men, without any authority from God, have presumed to say what we shall *believe*, and what we shall *do*, in *matters of religion*; and they have enforced their decrees with heavy pains and penalties, inso-much that, without being guilty of any *civil offence* whatever,

ever, a man shall be liable to have his goods confiscated, be disabled from suing in any court of law or equity, being guardian of any child, being executor or administrator to a will, be incapable of any legacy or deed of gift, of bearing any office, civil, military, or ecclesiastical, and be sent to prison, as at present in this country of ours; and in others they shall be liable to be put to death in the most cruel manner, merely for avowing *opinions* different from what other men have thought proper to decree to be *true*.

Now, many of you being engaged in other necessary pursuits, and not having had your attention drawn to these subjects, may know very little about church establishments in general, or of your own in particular, as little as many persons, for want of travelling or reading, may know of the country in which they live. You very piously, as you have been educated, go to church, say your prayers on Sundays, and follow your several occupations diligently and honestly in the course of the week; but many of you have little leisure to think about any thing farther. There is however, much more implied in being a *good churchman* than you may think of; as there are many things in the laws of our country, which are binding upon all the subjects, whether they have taken care to acquaint themselves with them or not. For it is presumed that men who have the use of their reason, will make use of it in whatever particularly *concerns them*.

Now, if this be the case with respect to the *civil* laws of your country, it must be the same with respect to the *ecclesiastical* laws of it. Besides, when you go to church, you do not go merely to hear what another person says, which a stranger might do without bearing any part in the service, or being responsible for the propriety of it; but you go to pray yourselves; and in your prayers you speak *to God*, and *concerning God*; and therefore should deliver nothing but what you have well considered, and think proper to be said to him, and concerning him. Consequently, if, upon that due consideration which you ought to give to
so

so serious a subject, you cannot deliberately assent to any thing that, in the forms of your public worship, you are required to say, you ought not to say it at all. If what all the congregation there join in be any thing not *true in itself*, and especially *false with respect to God*, and *unworthy of him*, you ought not to give your countenance and sanction to it, even by your presence. If you would not so much as join in a common song, or bear your part in the chorus, without approving of it, much less should you bear your part in a common prayer to Almighty God, without the most hearty approbation of the sentiments contained in it.

It is, moreover, taken for granted, that all members of any particular society hold the distinguishing principles of that society. Otherwise they are unworthy and improper members of it. You, therefore, who profess to be of the church of England, also profess to hold the principles of it, and especially the belief of all its *articles*, which the founders of your establishment have reduced to *thirty-nine*. These the preamble to them says, were agreed upon "for avoiding diversities of opinions, and for establishing consent touching true religion." And the royal proclamation prefixed to them requires not the *clergy* only, but "*all his majesty's loving subjects*, to continue in the uniform profession of them;" it prohibits "the least difference from them," and will not "endure any varying, or departing from them in the least degree."

With respect to the interpretation of these articles, this declaration says, that "they are to be taken in the true, usual, and literal meaning of the words;" and that "you are not to put your own sense or comment upon the meaning of any article, but to take them in their literal and grammatical sense." Now as these articles are dictated in very plain English, the literal and grammatical sense of which is very easy to be understood, you will see, by considering them, what the real doctrine of the church of England is, and what the faith of all the true members of it ought to be.

Farther

Farther, as this declaration says that these articles, "which contain the true doctrine of the church of England," are "agreeable to God's word," and you have this word of God, your Bibles, in your hands, you may judge for yourselves, whether this be true or not. By this rule you are *to try all things, and then hold fast that which is good.*

Your twentieth article says that, "though the church has power to decree rites and ceremonies, and has authority in controversies of faith," yet "it is not lawful for the church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's written word, and that it ought not to enforce any thing to be believed for necessity of salvation, besides what is contained in the same." If, then, any of these articles should contain what you cannot but see to be contrary to the word of God, as well as to your own plain sense and reason; and if they make any other *terms of salvation*, besides such as are made to be so in the word of God, your church will stand self-condemned. It appeals to the scriptures; and by the scriptures must all its articles, and every clause in them, be tried.

Now let us attend to a few of these articles, and consider whether the doctrines they contain, according to the plain, usual, and grammatical sense of the words in which they are expressed, be agreeable to scripture, or not. Please to have a copy of the articles open before you, as I now have, and as you are acquainted with your Bibles, to which the compilers of these articles appeal, compare them together, and then honestly judge for yourselves. I shall for the present pass over what relates to the doctrines of the *trinity*, and the *divinity of Christ*, because I reserve the consideration of them to a separate Letter, and shall content myself in this with mentioning a few other things, though as you will see, of very great importance, if what relates to the *favour of God*, and *final happiness*, be so.

Your ninth article says that, "Original sin is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man,"—and
"therefore

“therefore in every person born into this world, it doth
“serveth God’s wrath and damnation?” In consequence
of this, the tenth article says, that “man cannot turn, and
“prepare himself, by his own natural strength, and good
“works, to faith, and calling upon God: therefore we
“have no power to do good works, pleasant, and acceptable
“to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing
“us, that we may have a good will, and working with us,
“when we have that good will.” And your thirteenth
article says that “works done before the grace of Christ,
“and the inspiration of his spirit, are not pleasant to God;
“for as much as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ,
“neither do they make men meet to receive grace—Yea
“rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed
“and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they
“have the nature of sin.”

Now, is it not evident, from the plain sense of these articles, that, on account of *a sinful nature*, which every man since Adam necessarily brings into the world with him, it is not in his power to do any thing but sin? He cannot even rightly *call upon God*, or *pray*, till he receives something that is here called *the grace of God*, and the *inspiration of his Spirit*, which must necessarily be a thing independent of himself, and only what God is pleased to impart to him; all that he can do of himself being of the nature of *sin*, and offensive to God.

But how is this doctrine agreeable to the scriptures, or to common sense? All the prophets, who speak by authority from God, plainly suppose that those to whom they address themselves have a natural power of turning to God, and of doing what is pleasing to him. What is the substance of all their exhortations but *Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?* Now, would not this be a cruel mocking, and tantalizing of men, if they had no power at all of turning to God, but only a power of turning from him? What would you say to any man who should exhort one whom he plainly saw to have neither legs nor crutches, to get up
and

and run? And is God more unreasonable than man? Such, however, is the doctrine of your articles, in the plain and obvious sense of the words.

You will say *who then are to be saved, and how are they to be saved*, since nothing that any man can do of himself can contribute to his salvation, by making him acceptable to God. Your seventeenth article tells you all this very plainly, when it informs you concerning the doctrine of *predestination*, and *election*, as follows: "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, he hath constantly decreed by his council, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called according to God's purpose, by his spirit working in due season; they through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of his only begotten son Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity."

You see then that, according to this article, none can be saved but they who have been by God *fore-ordained* to it, and that the means of saving men is their being "called according to God's purpose, by his spirit working in due season." It therefore does not depend upon *men*, but upon *God* only, who worketh in them *when*, and *how* he pleases. It also plainly follows from this, that all those whom God does not predestinate to eternal life, and whom he does not call by his spirit, must miss of eternal life; the consequence of which, according to your articles, is, that they must suffer everlasting punishment, and through no fault of their own, but on account of such a *nature* as they brought into the world with them, and which, of course, they could not help. This doctrine is said, in the same article

article, to be "full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort, to godly persons, such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ." But what must it be to those who feel no such workings, and who have no means of procuring them?

Thus, my good friends, has your church decreed concerning this very important business of future happiness, and the way to it. But not so Almighty God. Every page in the scriptures declares the very contrary doctrine, viz. that God loveth the righteous, and that the condemnation of sinners is not from *him*, but from *themselves*. Predestination and election is, no doubt, mentioned in the scriptures, but then it means nothing more, as many divines of your own church have clearly proved, than the good pleasure of God in granting the knowledge of the gospel to some nations and not to others, at any particular time. And we are expressly taught by the apostle Paul, that whether it be more or less light that any part of the human race enjoy, they shall be judged by that light, so that no more will be expected of any man than God has given him power to perform, which is agreeable to natural reason and equity, Rom. ii. 14. *When the Gentiles who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves, which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing, or else excusing one another.*

Yet the very contrary of this rational and apostolical doctrine is expressed in your eighteenth article, which says, "they are to be had accursed, who presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect that he professes, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to the law, and the light of nature." According to this, you see that all those who have nothing more than the *light of nature*, or who have never heard of christianity, must perish everlastingly. For so harsh a censure as this those who framed the articles have thought proper to give the

following reason. "For holy scripture doth set out unto "us only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be "saved." This is taken from Acts iv. 12. But if you consult the passage you will clearly see that the *salvation* there spoken of is not salvation to *eternal life*, but only *salvation*, or *deliverance*, from *bodily diseases*, such as that of the lame man, who begged at the gate of the temple; and the plain meaning of the passage is, that no such miracle as that by which he was cured could be performed by any power, but that which was possessed first by Christ, and afterwards by the apostles; the truth of which cannot be questioned, because it was a power derived from God, who, as he first established the course of nature, can alone controul it.

Your church says, article nineteenth, "as the church of "Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch, have erred, so also "the church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living "and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith." Now I think that, after what we have been considering, we must say that the church of England also hath erred, in matters of faith, as well as the churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome. Indeed, what privilege has your church to exempt *her* from error, more than those churches, whose faith she takes upon her to condemn? If *antiquity* be pleaded for the purity of faith, the preference cannot be given to the church of England, which rose the latest of them all, as it was formed by Dissenters from the church of Rome; and if, on the contrary, *novelty* be any advantage (those who come after others, being able to see farther than those who went before them) we who now dissent from the church of England, have the same advantage over *her*, that she had over the church of Rome. If the founders of your church would prove their infallibility, they must work miracles; but this is what they do not pretend to, though the church of Rome does. But even miracles cannot prove that to be true which to reason and common sense appears evidently false; and such are the doctrines

doctrines above mentioned. Miracles can only prove that to be true which in its own nature *may* be so, and not that which is *absurd* and *contradictory* either to reason, or the scriptures. For we must take it for granted that God will not contradict himself.

I do not mean to trouble you with an account of every thing that is evidently contradictory to reason and the scriptures in your Articles, but I could not help dwelling a little upon such as appear to me to be of particular importance, and such, you must agree with me, are those above mentioned. They are not, however, errors peculiar to your church, but errors of former ages, as I have abundantly shewn in my *History of the Corruptions of Christianity*, which if you look into, you will see at what time they were introduced, and by what steps they prevailed. But having been received many centuries, it could not be supposed that the reformers from popery would be able to detect them all at once. Luther, and his noble cotemporaries, did a great deal, and we have reason to bless God for their labours. But, instead of acquiescing in *them*, we should feel ourselves animated with the same spirit, and go on to finish what they only began.

That some things, which are at least very like to what you yourselves would now call *popish doctrines*, are retained in the articles and services of the church of England, a slight degree of reflection will convince you. One of the capital doctrines of the church of Rome is that of the change made of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper into *the real body and blood of Christ*. The reformers saw that this was an *absurdity*, and not countenanced either by reason or the genuine sense of scripture; but such were the prejudices of the common people, and their own too, in favour of a long received doctrine, that the framers of your articles and liturgy have retained too much of it. In the Lord's supper, your twenty-ninth article says, "the body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, after an heavenly and spiritual manner;" and in your Catechism you are taught to say, that "the body

“and blood of Christ are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord’s supper.”

Now, if this language have any meaning at all, it cannot differ much from that of the Catholics; for *they* do not say that this bread and wine has the *taste* of flesh and blood. In common sense, these elements can be nothing more than a *sign, emblem, or memorial*, of the body of Christ, and not the *body itself*, which therefore, *verily and indeed*, is not eaten, at all, not even in a heavenly, or spiritual, or any other conceivable, manner.

To the receiving of these elements such a virtue is ascribed by your church as no experience will justify. For in the twenty-fifth article they are said to be “sure witnesses, and effectual signs, of grace, and God’s good-will towards us, by the which he doth work invisibly in us, and does not only quicken, but also strengthen, and confirm our faith in him.” Now there is nothing in the scriptures to authorize our ascribing so much to *this*, or to any other institution. All that our Saviour said upon the occasion was that we should eat bread and drink wine *in remembrance of him*; and being instituted immediately after the celebration of the passover, which was appointed in commemoration of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, there can be no doubt of its having the same simple and obvious meaning. It was designed to remind us of Christ, and of our obligations to him. There is no invisible agency of God upon the mind, either expressed or implied, in either of the services.

The superstition and abuses of former times with respect to the ordinance of *baptism*, are also retained in the articles and offices of your church, from which they ought long ago to have been expunged. In your twenty-seventh article, baptism is said to be “a sign of regeneration, or the new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly are grafted into the church, the promises of forgiveness of sin, and of adoption to be the sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed,
“faith

"faith is confirmed, and grace increased, by virtue of
"prayer unto God."

This is asserted concerning baptism universally. But how can it apply to the case of *infants*? And yet persons who are baptized in their infancy, are made to say in your catechism, that by baptism they are "made members of
"Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom
"of heaven." This is, surely, ascribing a great deal too much to a mere *ceremony*, in which also a child is intirely passive. Will not this doctrine fully authorize the superstition of the church of Rome, the priests of which communion often boast that, in heathen countries, they have privately, and unknown to their parents, baptized such young children as they met with, and particularly those that were upon the point of death, thinking thereby to secure their salvation?

Besides, how does this doctrine of baptism making persons "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors
"of the kingdom of heaven," agree with the doctrine of *predestination* above mentioned? Are all persons who are regularly baptized of course predestinated to everlasting life? Does the eternal decree of God depend upon the will of man? And yet, as if this was really the case, whenever you bury any person who has been baptized (and if they have not, you do not think them entitled to what you call *christian burial*) the minister is made to "thank God that
"it has pleased him to take to himself the soul of his dear
"brother, or sister," and the body is committed to the grave "in sure and certain hope of its resurrection to eter-
"nal life." Though the deceased have been ever so notorious a bad liver, and even a despiser of all religion, yet if he have been baptized, and have christian burial, the same confidence is expressed of his future salvation. Surely, my friends, *these things ought not so to be*. Men can never become heirs of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven by mere baptism, nor do all who have your christian burial go to heaven.

The popish priests, you know, pretend to a power of giving men *absolution*, when they have confessed their sins to them; which is certainly an usurpation of the rights of Almighty God, who alone knows the hearts of men, and has the power of forgiving sin; and yet this very offensive part of popery is retained in your office for the visitation of the sick. For there the priest is directed to say to the sick person, who has professed his belief of the apostle's creed, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences. And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." If these words have any meaning at all, they must imply that something relating to the forgiveness of sins depends upon *the priest*. For if *repentance* alone was sufficient, his absolution could signify nothing.

That these things, and many others of a similar nature, which I might point out to you, should pass uncorrected at the time of the Reformation, near three hundred years ago, is not to be wondered at. Those reformers are not to be blamed for doing no more, but to be commended for doing *so much* as they did. But surely those who came after them are to be blamed, those who have shut their own eyes, and have endeavoured to shut yours too, from that time to the present day; as if Luther and his brethren had been men divinely inspired and exempt from all error, and as if all wisdom was born and died with them; whereas they only set an example, which those who came after them ought to have followed.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XV.

Of Subscription to the Articles, &c. of the Church of England.

My Friends and Neighbours,

YOU will naturally say, If there be these strange absurdities in the articles and public services of our church, why are not our bishops and clergy sensible of them; and, as they are men of sense and education, how can they, as we know they are required, *willingly* and *ex animo*, subscribe to the truth of them. This is a question that I cannot answer. You must apply to them yourselves, and perhaps they may be able to give you satisfaction. However, when any man declares his unfeigned belief of any thing, I am not apt to question his veracity, as Mr. Madan does mine. I have a much better opinion of him than he has of me. And if he can, in so peculiarly solemn a manner, declare his belief of the Dissenters in general being disaffected to government, and that their declarations of loyalty are not to be trusted; if this opinion of his be "the settled principle and conviction of his heart, as he hopes for mercy from the God of truth," he must certainly have subscribed the thirty-nine articles with the same serious conviction of their truth. For he must know that God is a witness to that *subscription*, as well as to his composing, delivering, and printing his Sermon.

It well known, however, that the generality of his brethren do not believe these articles, in that *strict and grammatical sense* in which their subscription to them is required. They publicly preach, and even print, what is directly contrary to them. They will even be offended if you say that they are *Calvinists*, though the distinguishing doctrines of calvinism are no other than those of *original sin, predestination*, and other doctrines necessarily depending upon them, which I have shewn to be contained in the thirty-nine articles. This is so well known, that the late Lord Chatham (who was a very different man from his son, our present prime

prime minister, whose *transcendant abilities* are so much admired by Mr. Madan) in a celebrated speech which he made in the house of Lords in favour of the Dissenters, said, "We have a popish liturgy, a calvinistic creed, and an Ar-minian clergy."

You will naturally say that, as your clergy do subscribe these articles, it must be in some sense or other. But as bishop Burnet justly said long ago, "the greater part subscribe without ever examining them, and others do it because they must do it, though they can hardly satisfy their consciences about some things in them." Indeed, my friends, your clergy are trained to this business of subscription much too early, and before they are qualified to judge about it; but having done it once, and seeing others do the same every day, they come to make as light of it as too many persons in trade do of a *customhouse oath*, as if they thought that it implied no obligation at all. But in the very same manner thieves and pickpockets may be trained to *their* dishonest practices, and follow them through life, without ever reflecting on the wickedness of them.

However, your clergy, having subscribed to these articles (which they generally do without ever thinking about the matter) have sometimes found it necessary to allege something or other in justification of their conduct; and you will naturally have some curiosity to know what it is that they *can* say. Now, there have been no less than thirteen different reasons assigned by your clergy for their subscribing *willingly* and *ex animo*, to the literal truth of those articles, which at the same time they openly profess not to believe at all. I shall not trouble you with *all* the excuses, some of which exceed the ingenuity of a Jesuit, but I will just mention a few, that you may have some idea how very clever your clergy are, and with what dexterity they can split hairs.

Many say that they sign these articles "as far as they are agreeable to the word of God." But, if that had been sufficient, why were the articles composed at all? Would it not have been sufficient to require a subscription to the *scriptures* themselves? The subscription to these articles

articles, if it have any meaning at all, must be a solemn declaration, that they contain the true sense of the scriptures.

Very many of your clergy have said that they subscribe the articles not as *articles of faith*, but as *articles of peace*, meaning, I suppose, that they will not publicly controvert them. But had this been the meaning of the compilers, they certainly would not have required a *subscription* to them, but only a solemn *promise*, that the clergy would not publicly impugn them. This subscription to the articles as articles of peace, will give no peace to the mind of an honest man. The preface to the articles says that they were compiled "for avoiding diversities of opinion, and for establishing of consent touching true religion." But how does this kind of subscription prevent *diversity of opinion*? Many of your clergy not only hold, but publish, and earnestly contend for, very different opinions, on the most important articles of religion.

Mr. Paley, archdeacon of Carlisle, maintains that any person may subscribe the articles who does not belong to any of the three classes of men originally intended to be excluded from the church by them, viz. *Papists*, *Puritans*, and *Anabaptists*. Now, Mr. Paley's writings being in very high repute, and publicly taught to the youth at the Universities, this *new* idea of his concerning subscription is very likely to become prevalent. But can you think that this was the idea of the compilers, or of the legislature, at the time that this subscription was enjoined? If nobody was intended to be excluded from the church besides *Papists*, *Puritans* and *Anabaptists*, would not the tenets of these people have been particularly marked? And why are a variety of articles inserted to which they could all subscribe? None of these three classes of men were *Socinians*, and therefore, according to Mr. Paley, *they* may safely subscribe these articles; though the very first of them says that "in the unity of the godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power and eternity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." But should not I, who disbelieve this doctrine, be

be a great rascal, if I should subscribe it, in order to get preferment in your church?

Many persons, I am informed, think themselves justified in subscribing the articles of the church of England though they do not believe them, because it is well known to those who receive their subscriptions, that they do not, and therefore they say that they *deceive* nobody. But can you think that a *falsehood* is rendered innocent, by its being accompanied with *impudence*? What should we say of any man, who should take an oath that was known to be false by the magistrate who administered it? Would not the transaction cover both the parties with infamy? And surely we should not be less scrupulous in an affair of *religion*, from which oaths derive all their obligation, than we are in civil matters. Besides, all strangers, who know nothing about the persons who receive subscription, will naturally conclude that the man who solemnly subscribes to any thing, really *believes it*, and will never imagine that he thought to impose upon the world, and himself too.

Lastly, there are many who subscribe the articles as a mere form of admission into an office; thinking that they thereby only engage to do certain things, and recite certain forms of words, which the legislature requires, for a certain salary; but that their *belief* of what they are required to pronounce is not at all necessary. One of your clergymen has even said in print that when he is in the desk, he only says what the law appoints him to say, and pays him for saying, but that in the pulpit he speaks for himself, and is answerable for the truth of what he delivers. But do you think that nothing more is required of your clergy than of a public crier, or a town clerk, who must read whatever is put into his hands? Public criers are not required to *subscribe* to the truth of every thing that, in their office, they recite aloud. On this principle, your clergy might just as well conform to the church of Rome, profess mahometanism, or do any thing else, for a sufficient salary; and I fear that there are too many of them who would not scruple to do it; because

because what they would do then, would be no greater violation of their consciences than what they do now. Common sense will tell you that no man ought to subscribe what he has not well *considered*, and what he does not firmly *believe*.

Instead of merely subscribing their names to these articles, as the clergy now do, I wish the experiment was made of making them *declare upon their honour*, that they believe them, as they are required to do, *in the obvious, literal and grammatical sense of the words*, and that they make this declaration as *the settled principle and conviction of their heart*, as they hope for mercy from the God of truth. This new mode would at least make many of your clergy *think* a little more upon the subject than they appear to have done at present; and your teachers, though believing what I have clearly shewn to be exceedingly absurd, and manifestly unscriptural, would at least be *honest*.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

Of Mr. Madan's Idea of Unitarianism.

My Friends and Neighbours,

YOU have heard a good deal of late about *Socinianism*, or *Unitarianism*, and some of you may not know much about the matter, except that you have been led to conceive that it is something of a very alarming nature, something offensive to God, and highly dangerous with respect to its consequences in another world. But Mr. Madan has advanced something quite *new* on the subject; more than intimating that it is dangerous with respect to *the state*, as much so as any thing in popery. "To justify this assertion, it is *"necessary"* he says, p. 9, "to remark that the principles of the Socinian doctrine in this place are evidently gaining ground among the Presbyterians; and certainly those principles are not more consistent with the doctrine of the *"established*

“established church, and no less dangerous to the state, than any of the tenets of popery.”

As Mr. Madan does not tell you what this Socinianism, (which he describes as so very dangerous both to church and state) is, it is necessary that I give you some information on the subject, and then you will judge for yourselves, how far it is dangerous. Now Socinians believe that Christ is not God equal to the Father, as your church maintains, but they say that he was a man inspired of God, or a prophet; that he was sent of God to teach men the true way to eternal life, and especially to preach the doctrines of an universal resurrection, and a future judgment; that in order to enable him to teach these great doctrines with effect, he was empowered by God to work many miracles; that he was crucified, died, and was buried; but that God raised him from the dead, and took him up into heaven; where he is to continue till, in God’s appointed time, he will come again to raise all the dead, to judge the world, and to give unto every man according to his works.

This account of Socinianism, or more properly Unitarianism, is what I am sure you perfectly understand, much better, I am well persuaded, than you do your own church doctrine of *three persons in one God*, and of one of these persons becoming *incarnate*, in order, by his sufferings and death, to satisfy the justice of another of these three persons, for the sins of men. I am ready to acknowledge that this Unitarian doctrine is very contrary to that of your church, more so, indeed, than any thing in the system of popery. For with respect to every thing of this nature, the doctrines of your church are exactly those of popery. They were those that Luther and others had been educated in the belief of, and which, without any particular examination, they left as they found. But that such a doctrine as I have described to you has any thing in it hostile to the *state*, is what I have never heard before, except that whatever is hostile to the *church*, must, of course, be hostile to the *state* also.

Popery, I believe to be a very innocent thing with respect to the state at present, though it was not always so. Then,
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however, the danger arose not from any *religious tenets* of the Catholics, but from their subjection to a foreign head, and their attachment to the family of the Stuarts, to which family the high church party also had a strong leaning. The danger also that some persons still apprehend from popery, is on the same account, viz. the political nature of their system. But surely there is nothing of a political nature in the Unitarian doctrine. What has the belief of one God, or of the humanity of Christ, to do with any principle of the English constitution? No doctrine in philosophy, or medicine, can have less connection with it.

On this business Mr. Madan should have explained himself, and not have asserted that the principles of Socinians are hostile to the state, without some *evidence*, something in the form or shape of an *argument*. It is in vain to reply to a man who advances nothing to reply to, and who only confidently *asserts* what we as confidently deny, treating it as a mere *calumny*. But according to Mr. Madan, Dissenters being enemies to the church, they must, of course, be enemies to the state too; and Unitarians being of all other Dissenters the farthest from the church, they must therefore be the greatest enemies to the state; whether it can be made to appear (for this is what Mr. Madan has not yet attempted) that their principles bear any aspect at all towards the state or not. Since, however, to my great regret, we are to hear no more from Mr. Madan, I shall proceed as well as I can without him, and in my next give an account of the grounds of our Unitarian faith, that you may judge for yourselves whether *reason* and the *scriptures* be on our side, or not. The question is certainly of importance, deserving your very serious consideration, and that of Mr. Madan too.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XVII.

Of Unitarianism.

My generous Townsmen and Neighbours,

IN the *third part** of the LETTERS which I have taken the liberty to address to you, I promised you a sight of what Mr. Madan has thought proper to call the *contaminating dæmon of heresy*; assuring you that it had nothing at all *contaminating, or dangerous*, in its nature, but that, on the contrary, it was as *clean and harmless* a thing as a young lamb. You may think that in the *fourth part* of these Letters I neglected to fulfil this promise; but I really did not. For in it I gave you a distinct and plain account of what Mr. Madan must have meant by his *contaminating dæmon*, since *Unitarianism, or Socinianism*, was certainly in his eye; *this* being what he calls *heresy*, and what he represents as being of a more dangerous nature than popery itself. And yet I dare say you saw nothing frightful in it, and for that reason imagined that I had forgot my promise. To myself, that which is so great a bug-bear to Mr. Madan has long been perfectly familiar; for *after the manner which he calls heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers* (Acts xxiv. 14.) and be assured that he is quite mistaken with respect to it.

From the alarm which your clergy have been industrious in spreading about *Unitarians*, you will naturally imagine that we are little else than Atheists; neither believing in a God, in a providence, or in a future state, and professing no moral obligation at all, so that it is nothing but the laws and the gallows that restrain us from any enormity. Whereas

* These Letters were originally printed in different *Parts*, and published at different *times*. This Letter was the first of Part V.

we not only believe in a God, and every other principle of natural religion, but also in the divine mission of Christ, and in the certainty of his coming again, to raise the dead and judge the world, as much as your clergy themselves. We continually preach these doctrines, and lay the greatest stress upon them; and in consequence we consider ourselves as obliged to the strictest moral virtue in all respects; our thoughts as well as our actions, being under the inspection of an all-seeing God, whether our conduct be subject to the observation of *men* or not. If this be *Unitarianism*, you will naturally say, what great harm can there be in it; and what can be the reason of our clergy making such an outcry about it. I will then tell you.

This same Unitarianism, plain, simple and harmless, nay, great and noble, as it is, is not the doctrine of your church. Instead of worshipping only *one God, the Father*, you are taught to address your devotions sometimes, indeed, to the Father, but at other times to the *Son* (solemnly adoring him in your litany, "by his holy nativity and circumcision, by his baptism, fasting, and temptation, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death and burial," extraordinary proofs of divinity, no doubt) and likewise to the *Holy Ghost*, and sometimes to all these *three* together, under the appellation of *trinity*, or *three persons in one God*; and this doctrine of the *trinity* (a word which you will in vain look for in your bibles) is connected with many other fundamental doctrines of your church. And though this, or any other particular doctrine, might be changed, and the *establishment* itself, with its peculiar government, revenues, &c. remain unaltered, your clergy fear that if *any change*, though ever so reasonable, should once be made, *others* might follow, and they should not be able to say where the reformation might stop (for which I own there is some reason) and therefore they oppose *all changes*, though ever so trifling, and especially *this*, which is acknowledged to be a very fundamental one. It is just the case of
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the boy who would not say A, lest he should be obliged to say B, and then C, and at last the whole alphabet.

However, that this reformation in the articles of your church *ought* to be made, whatever be the consequence of making it, I shall endeavour to shew you, on the supposition that *truth* ought ever to be followed at all events. And if *truth*, and the *pure worship of God*, be on the side of us Unitarians, it is an advantage which we would not exchange for all the dignities and emoluments of your established clergy. Give me then, my friends, your candid attention, and I shall soon convince you, that we Unitarians have both *reason* and the *scriptures* on our side, and that your clergy have nothing but *authority*, and *acts of parliament*, on theirs.

If you look through the Old Testament, you will find nothing taught there, but the worship of *one God*, and the greatest possible stress laid on that worship, as opposed to the worship of *many gods*, to which the world, in the early ages, was peculiarly prone. The very first commandment, in which Jehovah, the only true God, is the speaker, is, "*Thou shalt have no other Gods besides me.*" Moses, repeating this most important doctrine says (Deut. vi. 6.) *Hear, Oh Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord*, and the prophet Zechariah (chap. xiv. 9.) *Jehovah is one, and his name one.*

The God who was thus worshipped by the Jews, was also the object of worship to Christ and the Apostles. Our Lord describes the *true worshippers*, as *they who worship the Father* (observe, he says nothing of *himself*, or the *holy spirit*, but only *the Father*) *in spirit and in truth*. John iv. 23. And when he himself prayed, as he frequently did, it was always to the same Being, called *the Father*, whom he represents as the *only true God*, John xvii. 3. *This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent*, that is, his messenger, or servant. This same great Being is called *the God and Father of Christ*,

Christ, as well as of other men—*Go to my brethren, says Jesus, John xx. 17. and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father, and to my God, and your God.*

All the prayers of the apostles were likewise directed to this one God and Father, and to no other person whatever. *For this cause, says Paul (Ephes. iii. 14.) I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and never to Jesus Christ himself.*

This is the uniform language of the apostles, and of all the primitive christians. They knew nothing of a *trinity*, to which you pray. Could they hear your litany, in which you say, *O God the Son, Redeemer of the world, have mercy upon us miserable sinners. O God the Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, have mercy upon us miserable sinners. O holy blessed and glorious trinity, three persons and one God, have mercy upon us miserable sinners*; could they hear your *vain repetitions*, exactly after the manner of the heathen worship, *Son of God we beseech thee to hear us; O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace; O Lamb of God that takest away the sins of the world have mercy upon us; O Christ hear us, Lord have mercy upon us, Christ have mercy upon us, Lord have mercy upon us*, they would be filled with amazement and terror, not being able to conceive that this should be the worship of christians. And indeed it is the worship of *antichrist*, and nothing else. For beginning with the worship of Christ, christians proceeded to the worship of the Virgin Mary, most impiously called *the mother of God*, of Saint Ann, the mother of Mary, called by the papists, *the mother of the mother of God*, but in plainer English *God's grandmother*, and of innumerable saints and angels also, which is the essence of *popery*, and so like *heathenism*, and so unlike *christianity*, that the whole system is justly termed *antichristian*.

Now, at the Reformation, though the prayers to *saints* and *angels*, and even to the *Virgin Mary*, were rejected, prayers to Christ, who is no more a proper object of worship than his mother, or grandmother, were retained. But

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whatever has been added to the scriptures, whatever has been *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets* that ought not to have been built upon it, such as Paul calls (1 Cor. iii. 12) *wood and hay and stubble*, must be consumed, before all the abominations of popery can be said to be done away, and pure christianity established in the world.

It is acknowledged on all sides, that there is but *one God*. This is so plainly the language of all the scriptures, that it cannot be denied by any christian, and therefore the advocates for the doctrine of the *trinity* are obliged to say that the *three persons*, of whom it is composed, viz. the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, make but *one God*. But if these three persons make no more than one God, is it not plain that each of them is no more than a *third part* of God, and not a *whole*, or proper God? For if each of them be a whole and proper God, there must, in all, be *three Gods*. This is so evident, that it is most absurd to deny it; and indeed the curious contrivances of your clergy to make these *three divine persons* into *one God*, though they shew great ingenuity, shew so much embarrassment, as must excite in plain men like you, when you reflect upon the subject, a smile of contempt.

When, for example, they read in John xiv. 28, that Jesus said, *the Father is greater than I*, which is evidently contrary to the doctrine of your *Athanasian creed* (according to which none of the three persons is *greater or less than either of the other two*) they say that he spake of his *human nature* only, and not of his *whole self*; his *divinity* being at the same time fully equal to that of his Father. But if a person may thus speak of any *part* of himself, as of his *whole self*, he may say the most contradictory things, and puzzle and confound his hearers, so that language shall be of no use whatever.

If Christ may speak of his *human nature* as of his whole self, he may, no doubt, also speak of his *divine nature* as of his whole self, and consequently he might say that he never suffered or died, and that he never rose from the dead. But would not this be a miserable equivocation, unworthy
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of any man, much more of our Saviour? It would be no better than any of you saying that you were not able to *peak*, secretly meaning that you could not do it with your *hands or feet*. Yet this ridiculous and contemptible proceeding the Trinitarians ascribe to our Saviour. Mr. Burn sees nothing amiss in this supposed conduct of our Saviour, which is only calculated to *deceive*, and must necessarily do so; and yet he thinks him, p. 62, "degraded to the rank "of a sophist" by the idea of his arguing with the Pharisees on their own principles. How innocent is the one, and how wicked the other. But so are men blinded by their prejudices.

There can be no doubt, but that when our Saviour spake of his Father as *greater than himself*, he meant what any other good man would do, when, on bidding adieu to his friends on his death-bed, he should say (as is very pious and natural) that he left them to the care of one who could do more for them than *he* could, meaning God; and he was then comforting his apostles under the prospect of his departure from them by death.

But one of the most curious reasons for ascribing equal honour and worship to God the Father, and to Christ, is that which is alleged by Mr. Burn, in his last Letters to me, from Rev. v. 13, *And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, heard I saying, blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the lamb, for ever and ever*. From this passage he infers, that "the "same essential adoration which is here offered to *him who* "sitteth upon the throne is, by the consent of heaven, ascribed "also to the *Lamb*," and hence he concludes, that "Christ "is either the proper object of divine worship, which no "creature can be, or that the first commandment is continually violated in heaven." He adds p. 57, "whether "it appears from this, that in no sense whatever is Christ "so much as called *God* in the New Testament, I leave to "the common sense of mankind to determine."

Now, my friends, I chearfully join issue with Mr. Burn, in this appeal to your common sense. Please to read over the passage once more, and see whether in it Christ be called *God*, or not. He certainly is not, but only *the Lamb*, which is no name of God, any more than *lion* or *bear*, and what do you see ascribed to him in it, but such *glory and power*, as all christians acknowledge to be his due, because in many passages of scripture it is expressly said that God gave it to him. *All power*, he himself says (Matt. xxviii. 19) *is given unto me in heaven and on earth.* *He received from God the father, honour and glory*, 2 Peter i. 17. And the reason of this power and glory being given to him is expressly said to have been his humiliation unto death. Phil. ii. 8, 9. *Because he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God hath also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* How clearly does this passage explain that which is quoted by Mr. Burn from the Revelation; and yet how clearly do you see that in it Christ is distinguished from *God*, and represented as subordinate to him. Heb. ii. 9, *We see Jesus who was made a little lower than the Angels* (the very phrase which the Psalmist uses to denote *men* in general) *for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.* Now I appeal to your common sense, whether the person *receiving* this honour and glory, can be of the same rank with him that *gives* it to him. Can he be a *God* who receives from another, and especially as a reward for suffering and dying? Can God suffer and die?

That *blessing and honour and glory and power* should be given to God, and to Christ at the *same time*, does not prove that they were ascribed to them *in the same sense.* We are commanded to *honour all men*, and also to *honour God*, and we may do both at the same time, but surely not in the same sense. By this curious argument of Mr. Burn,
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I can clearly prove to you that king David was God, as well as Jesus Christ. For we read, 1 Chron. xxix. 20. *And all the congregation blessed the Lord God of their fathers, and bowed down their heads, and worshipped the Lord and the king*, that is, they paid each of them suitable homage, but surely not the same *kind* of homage, though Mr. Burn's argument would prove as much. But the one being *God* and the other *man*, there was no occasion for the writer to point out the difference between them, it being such as no reader could overlook. The same, no doubt, was the case with the writer of the book of Revelation. Considering Christ as a man exalted by God, he could never imagine that any person would place him on a level with God, who had exalted him*.

You see in all these passages, though Mr. Burn does not, that *God* and *Christ* are spoken of as quite distinct persons, and of very different *ranks*; and if you look through the whole New Testament, you will find that they are never confounded; that the one is an humble *worshipper*, and the other the great Being who is *worshipped* by him; that God is always the *giver*, and Christ the *receiver*, and a receiver on account of *services done*, and *duties discharged*; and therefore it is that his example is proposed to us; that, like him, we may do what God requires of us, and be rewarded for it, as he was.

The writer of the book of Revelation expressly calls his prophetic vision, ch. i. 1, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*

* As I hope I shall always be willing to help a neighbour in distress, and even to lift an enemy's ox or ass out of a pit, when I find him unable to help himself, I shall in this case suggest to Mr. Burn an answer to this argument of mine, which he may not think of himself, but which will suit his purpose and ideas quite as well as any other argument in either of his two performances. It is, that David being a type of the Messiah, the congregation of Israel (who according to Bp. Horsley, so much admired by Mr. Burn, always expected the second person of the Trinity in that character) worshipped the *Antetype* in the presence of the *type*; so that this adoration was in reality paid to the two first persons in the Trinity, viz. God the Father, and God the Son. In Mr. Burn's next publication, I shall expect some acknowledgment for this assistance.

which God gave unto him. Moreover, whatever power, or authority, Christ receives from God, the scriptures teach us that he holds it in subordination to God, who gave it, and that it is to be surrendered up to him, as the apostle Paul says, 1 Cor. xv. 24, Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power; for he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted who did put all things under him; and when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him who put all things under him, that God may be all in all. This, being a part of your funeral service, you must very well remember: and I am persuaded you must frequently have been struck with it, as exceedingly unfavourable to the doctrine of the Trinity, and the proper divinity of Christ.

So far is Christ from being represented as *God*, that in all the New Testament he is never called any thing more than *a man*, even in his state of greatest exaltation, after his resurrection and ascension. How, for example, does Peter characterize him in his address to the Jews, at the feast of Pentecost, when he is shewing his auditors how great a person they had rejected? Even at that time, when he would naturally speak of his master in the highest terms, he only calls him (Acts ii. 22) *Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him.* Paul uses the same language when he says in his speech to the Athenians (Acts xvii. 31) *He (i. e. God) has appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that MAN whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.* In 1 Cor. xv. 21, *Since by man came death, by man comes also the resurrection of the dead.* Again, giving as it were the creed of all Christians he says, 1 Tim. ii. 5, *There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* And again, 1 Cor. viii. 6, *To us there is but one God*
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the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

Is not *Christ* here spoken of as intirely distinct from *God*, and could the apostle consider the title of *God*, as at all applicable to *Christ*, when, in the plainest language possible, he thus gives it exclusively to the Father, *To us there is but one God the Father?* It is not *one God the Trinity*, consisting of *God the Father*, *God the Son*, and *God the Holy Ghost*, according to the strange uncouth language of your Litany, but *God the Father* only. Can any language respecting the person of *Christ* be plainer than this of the apostle? And yet our adversaries are continually, but most impudently, reproaching us with departing from the plain and literal sense of the scriptures, and with putting figurative senses upon them. Judge now for yourselves, whether this be the case or not, and whether *they* must not have recourse to strange subterfuges, and perversions of scripture language, to find their doctrine of the Trinity in such passages as these, or hold it in any consistency with them.

I do not wish to tire you by enlarging on so very plain a subject as this. Only read the scriptures for yourselves. Though they are often ill translated, by persons who, *believing* the doctrine of the Trinity themselves, have represented them as more favourable to it than they ought to have done, yet their general sense is still sufficiently clear in favour of the proper *unity of God*, and the proper *humanity of Christ*. He is every where spoken of as *our brother, a man, in all things like unto his brethren*; so that when we are called *heirs of God*, we are said to be *joint heirs with Christ Jesus*. Rom. viii. 17. Does such language as this at all agree with the doctrine of the divinity of *Christ*? Would it not be a strange degradation of *a God*, to represent him as receiving an inheritance in common with men?

If you wish to read the reasoning of others on this subject, and particularly the tract so much recommended by Mr. Burn, p. 70, which he says has gone through three editions, do *me*, do *yourselves*, and the *argument*, the justice

to read at the same that piece of mine to which it is one of I believe, not less than twenty *answers*, all of which have not prevented the spread of the doctrine which I contend for in it, and of which I believe not less than thirty thousand copies have been sold. It is entitled *An Appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity on the following subjects, viz. the use of reason in matters of religion, the power of man to do the will of God, original sin, election and reprobation, the divinity of Christ, and atonement for sin by the death of Christ*, to which in the last editions, has been added, *a concise history of those doctrines, shewing when, and how they came to be adopted by christians*. There is also subjoined to it an account of *the trial of Mr. Elwall*, for writing against the divinity of Christ, at Stafford assizes, before Judge Denton. The last edition was printed by Pearson and Rollason, and is sold for four-pence, and the *tryal of Mr. Elwall* is printed separately by Mr. Swinney, and sold for two-pence. I would also recommend to your notice another small tract of mine intitled, *A general view of the arguments for the unity of God, and against the divinity and pre-existence of Christ, from reason, from the scriptures and from history*, of which the third edition is now selling, price two-pence. If you wish to know more particularly what I have to say of those texts of scripture, of which the Trinitarians avail themselves, as favourable to their doctrine, consult another cheap tract of mine, intitled, *A familiar illustration of certain passages of scripture relating to the subjects above mentioned*, price four-pence.

If you have leisure, peruse my larger *History of the Corruptions of christianity*, and also my *History of early opinions concerning Jesus Christ*, in which is clearly described the rise of the doctrine of the Trinity, and where I prove that the great body of primitive christians were strict Unitarians; but that the philosophizing christians, offended at the humiliating idea of having a crucified man at the head of their religion, after some time adopted the opinion of his being of a nature higher than the human; and that this exaltation of him went on, till they made him to be God equal to the Father;

Father ; but that this was a work of time, and not accomplished in less than about four hundred years after Christ.

You may, in some measure, perceive the progress of men's opinions on this subject in the *three creeds* which are adopted by your church. The first called the *Apostles' creed*, is Unitarian ; for in it *God the Father Almighty*, is spoken of as quite distinct from *Jesus Christ our Lord*. In the second, called the *Nicene creed*, composed A. D. 325, Christ is called *God of God*, and *Light of light*, the meaning of which is that Christ, though truly God, is not *God of himself* (*αυτοθεος*) which the Father alone was then called, but that he derived his divinity from the Father, and therefore was subordinate to him. But in the third, or *Athanasian creed*, (composed nobody can tell *when*, or by *whom*, but certainly after the time of Athanasius, who did not believe any such thing) all idea of *subordination* is intirely taken away ; and of all the three persons it is declared, that *none of them is greater or less than the other, none of them afore or after the other*.

These three creeds, you clearly see, are inconsistent with each other, though a common reader may not perceive it, and therefore the same church ought not to retain more than one of them.

You may now, my friends, judge in some measure for yourselves, whether there be any reason for the violent clamour that your clergy are raising against the Unitarians, in general, and myself in particular, as if, possessed by a *contaminating dæmon* we held some strange unscriptural and damnable doctrine ; and whether, on the contrary, we do not *speak the words of truth and soberness*. In my *Appeal*, to which I referred you before, you will find reasons equally plain and convincing for the truth of the other doctrines which offend your clergy so much, because they are contrary to those which make part of their system.

All I wish is that you would think, and judge, for yourselves, and then say whether some reformation of your public services might not be very easy and practicable. Do
you

you, for example, think that your liturgy would be a *worse*, that is a *less edifying* service, if such things as those I quoted above, and that are so offensive to pious Unitarians, were left out. It is only in a few places that such things as these occur; and if the rest of the service, which has nothing of this kind, give you no offence, why might not the whole be made uniform, all the prayers being addressed to God the Father, as the greater part of them actually are. Then, notwithstanding all our differences of opinion, we might all worship together, like brethren, and fellow christians, and even the difference of Unitarian and Trinitarian, not appearing in the public forms, would give no offence in private.

If you chose to have an *establishment*, that is, if it was thought proper that the state should make provision for religion out of the public funds, and give salaries to the ministers of it, it would be a truly *Christian* establishment, in opposition to a *Heathen*, a *Mahometan*, or a *Jewish* one; and not, as it now is, a *Trinitarian* establishment, in opposition to an *Unitarian* one.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVIII.

Of Mr. Burn's Letters, in Answer to mine.

My Friends and Neighbours,

AFTER waiting a considerable time from the promise of their *speedy publication*, I have received, and you, no doubt, have seen, *Mr. Burn's Letters to me*, in answer to mine; and as I informed you of what I thought of *Mr. Madan's Letter*, I will now tell you as plainly what I think of *these*. They discover a temper extremely chagrined, and fretful. The writer is evidently embarrassed in his argument, unwilling to retract his accusation, evidently false and

and injurious as it was ; and without any regard to evidence, either from reason, or from fact, he still avows the worst opinion of myself and my tenets. It is really painful to see a christian, and a clergyman, persisting as he does in the great crime of *calumniating his neighbour*, without the least sign of repentance, or remorse, so that according to the rule of the gospel, he is at present in a state of mind which disqualifies him for receiving forgiveness of God or man, Let us hope, however, that *in time* he will see his conduct in its true light, and make the public acknowledgment that his case requires ; and then no person will be more ready to forgive an offending brother, than myself. It will be a sad thing indeed if, like Cardinal Beaufort in the play, he should die without *giving any sign* of repentance, or hope of mercy.

“ To the continuance of our correspondence two things,” he says, p. 71, “ are indispensable, the one that I confine myself to the question, and the other that whatever I may think proper to advance on the subject, it be addressed to himself personally.” With respect to the former rule, I shall observe it more strictly than he has done ; but with regard to the latter, I strongly suspect that I shall oblige him the most by not observing it at all. For then he will have an excuse for discontinuing a correspondence, which you may perceive is unpleasant to him, and which it is said that his friends, if not himself, wish that he had never begun.

The professed object of his original Letter to me was to prove that “ I rejected the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ.” In answer to this I shewed him that, so far from *rejecting* this authority, all my writings on the subject proved that I considered it as being *infallible*, that I had constantly appealed to it, and had endeavoured to ascertain what the opinion of the Apostles really was, as desirous to discover, and abide by it. Was not this *keeping to the question*, and did not he ramble very wide from it, when he entered upon the discussion of the doctrine of *inspiration* in general ?

Now,

Now, however, he says, p. 15, that "my idea of inspiration does in fact set aside the infallibility of their testimony, and by consequence renders all appeal to them in this controversy useless and absurd." But with what *reason* he can say this, do you judge. If the apostles had no means of knowing what kind of being Christ was except by *inspiration*, and I had denied their inspiration, my appeal to their testimony would, indeed, be absurd; because, in that case, they would be left unable to give me any information on the subject. But if, without any inspiration at all, they were naturally competent to judge in the case, their *testimony* is as decisive, as if they had been inspired for the purpose, and an appeal to it is consequently proper. Can it be said that because I *admit* their testimony, without supposing them to be inspired (and they neither say that they were inspired for this purpose, nor do I see any occasion for it) I *reject* their testimony?

In my opinion, the apostles, who conversed with Jesus, were as capable of judging whether he was a *man*, as whether John the Baptist was one; and as they always called them *men*, I take it for granted that they supposed them to be so, and nothing more; though men inspired of God. This reasoning would be just, even if I denied the apostolic inspiration altogether; but this I admit as well as Mr. Burn himself; and *he* does not pretend to admit this *universally*, but only in *certain cases*, viz. when the object of their mission required it. In this also we entirely agree, and only differ with respect to the articles included in their mission.

Though Mr. Burn seems to take it for granted that the testimony of the apostles is of no value, unless it be founded on inspiration, our Saviour himself evidently considered it in a different light, when, speaking of the evidences of his divine mission, he says (John xv. 27) *and ye also shall be witnesses, because ye have been with me from the beginning*, and not because you are, or will be, supernaturally inspired to bear witness of me. If *inspiration* had been the proper foundation

foundation of their testimony, what occasion was there for their *being with him from the beginning*? A perfect stranger to the person of Jesus might have been *inspired* to bear witness of him; and if their intimate knowledge of him, acquired by long converse with him, was sufficient, what occasion was there for inspiration?

What is the end of *testimony* but to secure *belief*? If therefore, the ground of it be naturally sufficient for this purpose, nothing farther can be necessary. Now, the *historical evidence* of the miracles, of the death, and of the resurrection of Christ, on which the whole of christianity depends, is *of itself* a sufficient ground of our belief in them. And indeed, whatever inspiration we may suppose to belong to the writers of the evangelical history, our faith in them must rest on historical evidence at last, unless all mankind, to the end of the world, were equally inspired. We of this day, who have no pretensions to inspiration, can have nothing more than *historical evidence* for our faith in the inspiration of others. There was therefore no real occasion for it in the first instance. The evidence of *seeing* and *hearing* was quite sufficient for the purpose of those who actually saw the miracles, and common historical evidence is all that we can now pretend to have, that *they* did see and hear what they relate.

It is to such evidence as this, and to no other whatever, that the apostle John appeals for the truth of what he so confidently declares concerning the person of Christ, in answer to the Gnostics of his age, who held that he had not a real body, consisting of flesh and blood, but only the appearance of one, John i. 1, *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and which our hands have handled, of the word of life—that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you.* He says nothing of *inspiration*, which was indeed quite needless in the case, the evidence of the natural *senses* being abundantly sufficient.

This

This is a sufficient answer to Mr. Burn's query, p. 53, "if you allow the apostolic testimony to have been infallible without inspiration, I beg to be informed what it is in that testimony that induces your assent to any thing that it contains." The apostle John neither says, nor intimates, any thing about *inspiration* in this place, and yet he expected to be believed on his own evidence, and that of his fellow apostles, concerning what they had actually *heard and seen*. All therefore that Mr. Burn adds about *the authority of God*, or the *decision of my own reason*, is altogether impertinent.

I find I have not been able, plainly as I thought I had written, to make Mr. Burn understand the use that I have made of those writers who are commonly called *christian Fathers*, but I hope to succeed better with *you*, who have not his prejudices. He imagines, p. 43. 53, that I have recourse to them, meaning the *writers* among them, in order to determine the true sense of the scriptures, which he thinks we can better determine without them, and in this I entirely agree with him; thinking that as *commentators*, they were indeed most wretched interpreters of scripture. But then I did not appeal to them for any such purpose, but only to find out, by their evidence, what the bulk of the common christians of their age, persons who were no *writers*, or *commentators* at all, thought concerning Christ. Because, notwithstanding the sources of mistake to speculative and philosophizing christians, it may be presumed, that the bulk of the common christians would much longer retain the plain doctrine which they had derived from the apostles; and this I have abundantly shewn was that Christ was simply *a man inspired by God*, and not *God himself*.

Among the rest Tertullian, who wrote about A. D. 200, speaks of the unlearned christians of his day as not only *not believing* the doctrine of the trinity, but as extremely *shocked* at it; thinking it to be an infringement of the great doctrine of the *supreme monarchy* of God the Father; and

I have

I have shewn, by a great variety of evidence, that this was the case till after the council of Nice, A. D. 325. I therefore infer that this was the doctrine of the apostles, and consequently that, whatever sense we now fix to what they say concerning Christ, they could not have meant any thing else than that he was simply *a man inspired of God*, as other prophets before him had been.

Is not this, now, a very clear and satisfactory mode of reasoning on the subject? Why then does not Mr. Burn understand it, and allow the force of it? He is, however, so far from allowing it, that he still repeatedly charges me with even *wilfully* hiding the truth from the eyes of my readers by this mode of reasoning. "You must have known," says he, p. 24, "that in the question before us the introduction of those passages" (viz. from the Fathers) "was nothing to the purpose;" and at the same time he charges me with "a disingenuous purpose of confounding the business." In p. 41, he finds "a fresh specimen of the same disingenuous temper." These attempts he says, p. 50, "he must regard as made with no other design than that of concealing from the public view, and of rescuing from public detestation, the tendency of my opinions;" and in p. 51, he speaks of "the struggles of my superior understanding," as he is pleased to call it, to conceal its "own embarrassment." Now, in general, I am on the contrary, considered as the most *undisguised*, and therefore the most *imprudent* of writers, frankly avowing the most offensive sentiments in the plainest terms, and admitting all their consequences. Whence then all this suspicion of *artful disguise* and *disingenuousness*, which necessarily implies *a bad heart*? It is mere *railing*, and the most improbable *accusation*, without any *proof*, or the appearance of it.

With respect to himself, he says, p. 67, that he has *fought fairly*, meaning that he has not wilfully used any fallacious arguments, but has honestly fought, and contended for the truth. Why, then, cannot he have the common candour to admit the same concerning *me*? Are there no honest

honest men in the world besides those of his own persuasion? I consider him as a man under the force of very strong prejudices, such as make *him* blind to such things as I am confident I can make *you* see very clearly; but this implies no *baseness*, nothing *disingenuous*, *immoral*, or *wicked*, which is the idea that he exhibits of *me*; and therefore I think that my principles, whatever they are, admit of more candour than his.

He charged my principles with being *big with every mischief*, implying a renunciation of the authority of scripture; and that even the decalogue itself was in danger of being disregarded by me, so that he even *trembled at* the application of my principles. Now, in order to make him easy on this subject, for the sake of the quiet of his mind, and the health of his body (which I was apprehensive might suffer by the terror that he was thrown into) I shewed him very clearly that his fears were without foundation; that I was as firm a believer of every thing that had a good *moral tendency* as he himself, and that the best rule of judging concerning the danger of any principles, was that plain one of our Saviour's. *By their fruits ye shall know them*. And yet, without paying any proper attention to this, he still persists in saying, p. 3, "the more extensively your opinions are known, the more universally they will be reprobated, as tending in a direct manner to weaken the credibility, and to defeat the end, of the christian dispensation." Now can this be any thing less than absolute *raving*? But even *this* is far less reproachful than what he says concerning me. You see in my writings, and I hope in my life and conversation, that my principles do not weaken the credibility, or defeat the end, of the christian dispensation, if that end was a good moral conduct.

In answer to my appealing to the excellent maxim of our Saviour above mentioned, *By their fruits ye shall know men*, he says, p. 59, "you must be aware that this maxim, though in general a safe guide, does not hold universally." Now, I do not think that Mr. Burn, with all his wisdom,
will

will ever find out a better rule of judging than this very plain one of our Saviour's, though it happens not to answer his purpose of condemning me. Besides, if I say the same concerning any saying of our Saviour's, viz. that it is not to be understood *universally*, or in *it's plain and literal sense*, I am instantly accused of denying his authority, and of setting up my own reason against that of God; so ready are men to see a *mote* in a brother's eye, when they cannot see a *beam* in their own.

I shall, however, soon quit this subject of Mr. Burn, submitting what I have observed to your reflections, and his; and desiring him to peruse with more care what I have written on the subject of inspiration in general, and other articles of christian doctrine at which he has taken so much offence, and which he has endeavoured to exhibit in so frightful a light; and in time he may be better qualified to write about them than he appears to be at present. As yet he has much to learn even from those whose writings he treats, or affects to treat, with contempt. But in order to prepare himself for acquiring more knowledge, he must first get a more candid and teachable mind. For there are persons whom the plainest instructions serve only to *irritate*, and not to *enlighten*.

If we had not facts of this kind to appeal to, the New Testament history would appear incredible. But there are at this very day minds as obdurate as those of the scribes and pharisees in our Saviour's time; and there is *reasoning* so plain and convincing, that if men can so shut their eyes as not to be impressed by it, they would not be at a loss to find means of evading the force even of *miracles* themselves, if they were equally averse to the object of them. In my opinion, the man who can seriously say that to acknowledge *three divine persons, none of them greater or less than the other*, is not to acknowledge *three Gods*, is capable of evading the force of any evidence whatever. Mr. Burn, however, says p. 54, he "rejects with indignation the opinion which by
"any mode of fair construction is chargeable with the con-

“sequence of worshipping *more gods than one*,” without seeing that his avowed opinion most directly implies it.

Be upon your guard, my good friends, against such strong prejudices, and such egregious *self deception* as this; and dread any situation in which a man shall be exposed to them. Mr. Burn will say that the scriptures teach the doctrine of *three persons in one God*, and, strange as it appears to me, I have no doubt but that he really thinks so. But the Catholic, with equal honesty, says that, according to the clear doctrine of the scriptures, and the plain obvious sense of them, the bread and wine in the Lord’s supper are the *real body and blood of Christ*, and they both say that *reason* must give way to *christian faith*. Be very cautious, however, how you admit any doctrines which require this sacrifice of *reason*, the great principle which God has given us, as our only guard against the grossest delusion and imposition. By this principle only can we judge both of the truth of any revelation from God to man, and of the *sense* in which any revealed truths are to be understood.

In order to serve us in these important respects, reason cannot, surely, be that weak and contemptible thing that Mr. Burn, and such preachers as he is, are continually representing it to be. It is the gift of God, and, no doubt, as perfect in its kind, as our *hands, eyes*, or any other part of our constitution, and has suffered no more by the fall of Adam, whatever that was, than our hands, eyes, or any other of our members.

You must now be sensible that, in these *last Letters*, Mr. Burn has by no means exculpated himself from the charge of *gross calumny*, which he incurred by his *first*. He persists in charging me with rejecting the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ, when it appears from all my writings, that I pay the same implicit respect to it that he himself does, that I constantly appeal to it, and am as ready to abide by it. He also continues to charge my principles with the worst moral tendency, without being able to prove any part of his heinous accusation; and now he is so far from

from repenting of his foul detraction, and abuse, that he adds to it, by taxing me with *insincerity*, and much *artful misrepresentation*, on purpose to hide the truth, to conceal the bad tendency of my principles, and to ward off the detestation with which they would otherwise be regarded. You, who have attended to us both, I am confident, have seen no evidence whatever of the truth of this accusation, and therefore you must consider him as aggravating his former offences, by the addition of a new one.

I do not notice every thing that is contained in Mr. Burn's Letters, because I think that what I advanced before is quite sufficient; and with respect to many things I am content that he should have the *last word*, whatever use he may make of the circumstance. Besides, he says, p. 70, "the sense of the scriptures makes no part of the present question between us;" and I have abundantly replied to every thing of a different kind.

Many of you to whom I am now addressing myself are Mr. Burn's hearers; and as I suppose he does not confine himself to the teaching of orthodoxy in *doctrine*, but sometimes, at least, exhorts you to good *moral conduct*, and among other things tells you not to *revile*, but to *do to others as you would have them do to you* (precepts which you see he has shamefully violated) join your exhortation to mine, in order to bring him to repentance. It is the duty of all christians, and not of ministers only, to *reprove, rebuke, and exhort*, and *not to suffer sin in a brother*. If he pay no regard to your friendly admonition, then you must content yourselves with doing as he *says*, but not as he *does*; for, like the scribes and pharisees of old, *he saith and doeth not*.

If the bishops took any proper care of the morals of their clergy, Mr. Burn would be censured by them, and if he did not repent, and make his repentance as public as his fault, he would be suspended from his ministry. But in this degenerate age, and relaxed state of discipline, nothing of this *wholesome severity*, I fear, is to be expected.

On the contrary, it is even said that he has received the thanks of two bishops, if not more, for his abuse of me; and it is farther reported, that he has even threatened to put me into the *spiritual court*, for charging him with advancing a *falsehood*. But I should think that if this take place, he should accompany me, for advancing that falsehood; and then, being confined together, we might have an opportunity of discoursing over, and settling, the matter in dispute between us. I hope, however, that, without the interference of *law*, civil or ecclesiastical, he will learn by what has already passed, to deal no more in *scandal*, and then there will be no more occasion for you, or me, to reprove him for it.

I am, &c.

LETTER XIX.

A short History of the Dissenters, and an Account of their General Principles.

My Townsman and Neighbours,

AS it is very possible that many of you may know little more of *Churchmen* and *Dissenters*, than their names, and some external circumstances relating to them; as that Churchmen frequent the *parish churches* on Sundays, and Dissenters other places of public worship, commonly called *meeting-houses*, you will not, I hope, take it amiss if I endeavour to give you some farther information on the subject. For it can do you no harm to know your neighbours and yourselves a little better than some of you now do; and this I hope will tend to prevent the bad impressions that your preachers are frequently endeavouring to make upon

upon your minds with respect to us, especially in such Sermons as they commonly deliver on the 30th of January, the anniversary of the *martyrdom*, as they call it, of their favourite prince Charles I. I shall therefore give you the following short and plain history, the truth of which I wish you to inquire into; for I do not desire you should take this, or any thing else on my bare word.

From the time that christianity was preached to our Saxon ancestors, about A. D. 597, till the time of Henry VIII. they continued attached to the Roman see, and some articles of reformation being urged by Wickliffe and others, the bishops persecuted their followers, putting many of them to cruel deaths. For it was then a fixed maxim, that *heresy* was not to be tolerated.

Henry VIII. wishing to be divorced from one wife, and to marry another, quarrelled with the pope, who delayed to grant him the necessary dispensation, and made himself the supreme head of the English church, instead of the pope; but he retained all the essential doctrines of popery, and actually put to death several persons who denied them.

After his death Edward VI. promoted a farther reformation; but it was all undone, as far as *power* could undo it, by queen Mary. In her reign many protestants were burned alive, and others fled, especially to Geneva and Frankfort. There they differed about the best method of church-government, some thinking it better that the government of each congregation should be within itself, while others preferred such a *diocesan episcopacy*, as they had been used to in the time of popery. They also wished to retain the use of some popish habits and ceremonies. Queen Elizabeth, who was a great lover of pomp and power, taking part with the latter, discouraged and persecuted the former, during the whole of her long reign.

James I. and Charles I. were still more fond of bishops than queen Elizabeth, finding in them an addition to their own power, such as our kings experience to this day. In the reign of these kings, notwithstanding a very severe persecution, in which many died in prison, and many fled

the kingdom (of whom a considerable number took refuge in North America, then an inhospitable desert, and at their own expence founded colonies in it) there was a great increase of persons disaffected to the church of England. For though the things about which they differed were not of much importance in themselves, and were even acknowledged to be so, they thought it of consequence to resist the *imposition of them* by so improper an authority as that of *men*; since, in matters of religion, they thought themselves bound not to respect any *human authority* whatever, but only that of *God* and of *Christ*.

Though this *scruple*, as it is sometimes called, has generally made these persons to be considered as men of *weak minds*, it was in fact a proof of great *strength of mind*, and shews that they acted upon more just and enlarged views of things than they who superciliously stigmatized them in that manner. For a power of decreeing rites and ceremonies, and much more of determining controversies of faith, which the church of England assumes, is a power that is absolutely *indefinite*, and of the very same kind with those claims which, in things of a civil nature, always give the greatest alarm. A tax of a penny, for example, is a trifle, but a power of *imposing* such a tax is never considered as a trifle, because it implies absolute servitude in all who submit to it.

It was natural also that the same persons who thus strenuously asserted their *religious liberty*, sacrificing to it all that was dear to them in life, should have a strong sense of their *civil liberty*; and accordingly those who at that time were called *Puritans*, from professing a purer mode of worship, and farther removed from the abuses of popery than the members of the church of England, were among the first to take alarm at the measures of James and Charles to extend the power of the crown, and to trample upon the rights of the people*; so that when the civil wars broke out, these Puritans, or Dissenters, and those who favoured

* Mr. Hume, though a friend to the Stuarts, somewhere acknowledges that this country is chiefly indebted to the principles and spirit of the Puritans for its civil liberties.

them, who were the more serious and sober part of the nation, took part against the king, and the more loose and profligate joined him.

Whether it was that the troubles of the times contributed to give the people a more serious turn, and by that means disposed them to join the Puritans, and the friends of liberty, it appeared that, though the parliament called by the king was at first *episcopalian**, the members of it were afterwards in general of the Presbyterian persuasion; and after the death of the king, the Presbyterian government was, to all appearance, as firmly established in this country as episcopacy is at present.

The restoration of Charles II. though chiefly promoted by the Presbyterians, gave such vigour to the cause of episcopacy, that the friends of it soon prevailed in parliament; and the king and the court, forgetting their obligations to the Presbyterians, adopted every measure to discountenance and punish them. Episcopacy was restored, and such an *act of uniformity* passed, as excluded two thousand learned and conscientious clergymen from their churches; and no provision being made for their support, and various acts of parliament being made on purpose to distress them, great numbers of Nonconformists, not less than eight thousand in all, perished in prison, and not less than two millions of property, on one pretence or other, was unjustly wrested from them. A list was taken of sixty thousand persons who had suffered on a religious account from the restoration to the revolution. From those who could not comply with the terms of conformity in the reign of Charles II. and who suffered in consequence of it, it is the boast of the present Dissenters to be descended.

In the reign of James II. an avowed Catholic, the church of England, being in danger, was glad to avail itself of the aid of the Dissenters, and both parties concurred in calling

* Neither Pym, Hampden, Hollis, nor any others of principal note in the long parliament were Presbyterians; and the Earl of Essex, who first commanded the army of the people, was a strenuous episcopalian.

in William III. This prince so strongly recommended *toleration*, that presently after his accession, an act for this purpose passed both houses of parliament. But notwithstanding their recent obligations to the Dissenters, the bishops and other zealous churchmen, soon shewed the ill will they bore them, by refusing to repeal the *Corporation and Test Acts*, and also another act for the *comprehension* of the Dissenters in the church, by an alteration of some things which were then chiefly objected to, though the measures were strongly recommended by the king; who, having been educated in Holland, was well acquainted with the benefit of toleration; so that it may safely be concluded that, had not the *Act of Toleration* been proposed at that particular period, it would not have passed at all. Bishop Burnet says, that his credit was much sunk, meaning with the clergy, by the zeal which he shewed for this Act. *History of his own Times*, vol. 3, p. 12. Presently after he says, p. 15. "the clergy began to shew an implacable hatred to the Non-conformists, and seemed to wish for an occasion to renew old severities against them."

The Dissenters, being from their circumstances (for no other kind of merit is pretended) the friends of *civil liberty*, and of a *limited monarchy*, will always be favoured by those who are called *whigs*, in the established church, and their chief opposers will be those who are called *tories*, or the friends of *arbitrary power*.

Still the Unitarians were left exposed to all the rigour of the former statutes, and none could enjoy the benefit of the toleration, but upon condition of subscribing all the doctrinal articles of the church of England; or teach a school without a licence from a bishop. More liberty has lately been procured in these respects. But Unitarians, whose numbers are allowed by all to be greatly increasing, were not only exposed to the former laws, but a new one was enacted against them, which makes it eventually confiscation of goods, and imprisonment for life, to profess that doctrine. This was a law made in the time of William himself,

himself, and which, you see, Mr. Madan would not have repealed.

Notwithstanding all these discouragements, the number of Dissenters is probably increasing, and those who adopt our principles in the church, but who cannot persuade themselves to abandon it, are increasing in a still greater proportion; so that the inconveniences of the present establishment are every day more apparent. And as the minds of men cannot fail to be more and more enlightened, the evil must in time appear to be so great, that some redress will be found; and the longer it is delayed, the more complete it may be expected to be. Sensible of this, we are not very solicitous about any reformation at present. Let the evil grow more conspicuous, and the remedy will be more certain and effectual.

I am, &c.

LETTER XX.

Of the Situation of the Clergy of the established Church.

My Friends and Neighbours,

IF it be of consequence to all men to have some knowledge of their *neighbours*, with whom they have frequent intercourse, it must be much more so to know *themselves*, the society to which they belong, and the government under which they put themselves, with all its *defects*, as well as its *excellencies*; and since nothing in this world is *perfect*, we should be continually endeavouring to put things into a state of improvement. Having therefore endeavoured to give you some idea of the rise and principles of the *Dissenters*, I shall now point out to you some things that it behoves you to attend to in the constitution of your
established

established church. And as your clergy are continually displaying its *excellencies* (which I am far from denying, but on the contrary endeavouring to adopt) you will naturally expect from *me* some account of its *defects*. In this I am not unwilling that you should make what allowance you think proper for *my* prejudices, as well as *theirs*; and all that I wish is, that you would inquire, and judge impartially for yourselves. It is a business that much more nearly concerns *you*, than it does *me*.

I shall not enlarge upon all the particulars that, in my opinion, require to be reformed in the system of your established church, for that would require a volume; but in this Letter I shall mention a few circumstances in the situation of the *clergy* unfavourable to them, and to religion, because of *these* you will be better judges than of many other things in the constitution of the church, and by these you may judge of the rest of the system. And it is the *system* to which they are subject that makes the clergy to be what they are, and they must be more than *men* to withstand the fatal influence of it. No other set of men whatever could be expected to *be*; or to *do*, more than they are, or than they do, in their situation. This general acknowledgment, in the making of which I am perfectly sincere, will, I hope, excuse any seeming breach of candour in what I shall have occasion to say on this subject.

1. The first thing that I shall observe unfavourable to your clergy, and consequently to religion, and to yourselves, is that the persons whom their services respect have no power of appointing or dismissing them. Should this be the case with your clerks, and agents, what could you expect of them? Would they not soon behave more like *masters*, than *servants*? And, accordingly, with you the very idea of the clergy being your *servants*, men who are paid for doing a certain duty, is in a manner lost, though that is the very meaning of the word *minister*. It is this one circumstance that contributes most to make the striking difference that there actually is between the character and behaviour of
dissenting

dissenting ministers and those of your clergy. A drunken, a swearing, or debauched minister among us, I will venture to say, you never heard of, though such characters are not uncommon among you. This is not because we are naturally better than they, but because our circumstances oblige us to be so. Take away the restraint that we are now under, and in time, when the effect of good habits, which now prevail among us, should be over, and when the new circumstances should be able to operate, there would be no difference between us and them.

In general, also, no person with us ever thinks of educating a son for the ministry if he be not thought to be a youth both of a pretty good capacity, and of a serious turn of mind; because his respectability, and his success in his profession, depend upon them. But this, you well know, is not the case with you; because a man who has good connections, though very slender qualifications, and no extraordinary character, may be introduced into very high, if not the highest, dignities in your church. Many of them are constantly filled with the younger sons of good families merely because they furnish a reputable maintenance for them; and this is one circumstance that interests the great families in this country in the support of the establishment; and the same is the case with respect to the establishment of popery abroad*.

* As there is no system so bad as to be without its admirers (and indeed there is no *evil* without some *good* attending it) many think it much better that their parishoners should not have the choice of their ministers, since that would endanger the peace of the parish. But for the same reason, it would also be better for the people of this country to have no votes in the election of members of parliament, or any controul, direct or indirect, over any part of the civil government. One absolute master would much better preserve the peace, and prevent dissention and cabal. Every power that man has requires *prudence* in the use of it. But must such a creature as *man*, whose distinguishing faculty is *reason*, be debarred from the use of it, and abandon all his natural powers, because, if any thing be left to his *discretion*, it is of course left to his *indiscretion* also? It would then be much better to be a brute animal, under the absolute direction of another.

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In the late glorious revolution in France this great abuse has not been overlooked. All the bishops, and officiating clergy in general, have been made *elective* by those whom their services respect, and neither the pope nor the king has so much as a negative on the choice of the people. Nay, *Protestants* and *Jews* have equal votes with *Catholics*.

2. Another circumstance unfavourable to your clergy is that their education does not tend to prepare them for the proper duties of their profession, since they are not of a theological nature. As the clergy are a body of men whose business it is to teach others religion, you would expect that they should first be taught it themselves. But this is not the case. No provision is made for it in the universities. There nothing is necessarily taught but the classics, and other branches of what is generally called *profane literature*, and even in this respect the great body of your clergy are but indifferently furnished; for as I am informed, great numbers of them have no university education at all. In the northern counties this is said to be a very rare case indeed. It is also much too easy a thing for persons of other professions, the law, the army, or navy, or even from common trades, to get orders, provided they can procure titles to livings.

Well did our Saviour say, *the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light*. Would any of you take a clerk into a counting-house who had not been taught arithmetic, or who, in any other respect, had not been trained to the business in which you wanted to employ him? Would you, instead of having recourse to a regular attorney, get important writings drawn by a person who had not been properly instructed in the nature of them, and who had had no practice in things of that kind? Or would you trust any man with the conduct of a manufactory merely because some great man, or some particular friend, wanted to find a decent provision for him? If you did, you well know there would soon be an end of the business of your counting-houses, your manufactories, and all your
affairs;

affairs; and, that you would want some provision for yourselves.

I do not boast of the situation of things among the Dissenters; but it would be very extraordinary indeed if we were not better qualified for the performance of what is required of *us*, than your clergy are, for what is required of *them*; because the duties of our profession are the great objects of our education. Classics, mathematics, and philosophy are not neglected; but with us every thing is made subservient to the study of theology, the knowledge of the scriptures, the composition of sermons, and the discharge of other parts of ministerial duty.

It is obviously necessary that every christian minister should understand the languages in which the Bible was written; and in our places of liberal education we are always taught *Hebrew* as well as Greek. But with your clergy this is a voluntary thing. They *may* learn Hebrew, as they may Chinese, or any other language, but they are under no obligation to do it. Their getting orders does not depend upon it. Do you inquire among the clergy in this town and neighbourhood, and I will venture to say, without knowing any thing particular of the matter, that you will not find one clergyman in an hundred who can so much as read a Hebrew word, and not one minister educated at any of our academies, who cannot read and construe it. Greek, your clergy learn because it is an article of classical education, and not because it is the language of the New Testament.

In consequence also of our mode of education, a habit of *composition* is universal among dissenting ministers, but it is by no means so among yours. It is generally thought that, though there are ten clergymen for one dissenting minister in this country, we compose more sermons than they do, and our publications of other kinds are far more numerous than theirs in proportion to our numbers; which is a proof that, in general, we are of a much more studious turn than they are. The sermons the most admired for their composition

position of any that your church has boasted of in the present age, were those that were published by Dr. White, professor of Arabic, at the Bampton Lecture. But a great part of them now appears to have been written by a Dissenter, a person educated at the very meanest of our academies, and formerly my most humble admirer, though afterwards my opponent, Mr. Badcock.

The deficiency of the clergy in that kind of learning which most becomes their profession is evident from my controversy relating to the person of Christ. *Bishop Horsley's Tracts* you will hear cried up by Mr. Madan, and others. But the probability is that they have not read even *them*, and much less what I have written on the other side of the question, especially my *History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ*. Let Mr. Madan himself, who speaks of my "smarting under this bishop's lash," say upon his honour whether he has or not. I have too good an opinion both of his judgment, and of his integrity, to think that he will say thus much; though, without much reading on the subject, he may think himself warranted to join in the general plaudits of his order on the side of their champion. A bishop lately deceased, and who was acknowledged to be one of the best scholars not only on the bench, but of his age, told me about the time of the opening of this controversy, that so low was the state of this kind of learning, viz. an acquaintance with the Fathers, and christian antiquity, that he did not know that there was a single person among the clergy who was at all prepared for any discussion of the kind; and this has been abundantly verified in the course of the controversy.

3. It is highly unfavourable to the character of the clergy that the temptation they are under to make *false declarations* is, in several cases, greater than there is any reason to suppose that the bulk of mankind can withstand; and if we go upon the idea that one set of men will, in general, be better than another, we shall certainly be deceived. In the first place, the clergy are obliged to subscribe the thirty-nine articles

articles of the church of England at a time when it is absolutely impossible that they should have properly considered them, and this subscription is to be repeated on their induction into every new living. Now, I do not say there is no clergyman who has fairly *considered* these articles (which however, judging by my own experience, will require the study of some years, and in general it is to be feared that it is not the business of a single day) who can *ex animo* subscribe to the belief of them *all*, in that *plain and literal sense* in which his subscription is by law required. But at this day, when so much more light hath been thrown upon these subjects than was to be found at the time the articles were composed, it is highly improbable that this should be the case; and the bulk of the clergy do unquestionably subscribe them without any thing that can be called *examination*, and consequently without any proper belief of them at all.

Now, is not this an unpromising introduction into an office in which it is a man's duty to teach *the importance of truth*, the necessity of *enquiry* for the discovery of truth, and the obligation of *sincerity* in the profession of it; duties which he must be conscious to himself he has wholly neglected, or grossly violated? The clergy must also give their unfeigned *assent and consent* to every thing contained in the liturgy of the church of England, the book of canons, and other things which at this day it is barely possible they should really approve. But when men have been educated to a profession, so that they can get a genteel subsistence by it, and have no prospect of any maintenance at all without it, what can you expect? All men are not saints, and no men are angels.

How, also, is it to be expected that men should indulge a spirit of *free enquiry in matters of religion*, when they know before hand that they cannot change a single opinion without making it necessary for them, if they be honest men, and will not have recourse to unworthy artifices, to give up all their means of support? In this case, if they have a turn for speculation, they will naturally make choice of any other subject

subject rather than *religion*. I have heard of more instances than one of clergymen refusing to read my own publications, lest their minds should be disturbed by them. One, I was told, who had experienced that inconvenience himself, seriously cautioned a younger clergyman never to look into any of them.

Also, having no motive to *free enquiry* themselves, the clergy will naturally be enemies to it in others, and, on one pretence or other, they will discourage the reading of any books that can tend to unsettle men's minds, and change their opinions; because it might eventually lead them to think more unfavourably of the established system. It is a remarkable fact that, in almost all places in which there are *public libraries* on such a liberal and open plan as that which has lately been established in this town, the clergy have in the first instance discountenanced them; and when that could not be done, they have endeavoured to get the controul of them, for the sake of keeping out such books as they wish the common people not to read; while the Dissenters have always been foremost to promote these libraries, and when they have been instituted, have been as ready to introduce into them books unfavourable to their opinions, as those in favour of them. We are used to free enquiry, and love to encourage it.

The solemn declaration which the clergy are required to make at the time of receiving orders, viz. that they are moved to undertake the office of a christian minister *by the Holy Ghost*, is what ought not to be required; because, if the words have any meaning at all, their declaration implies that they feel some *supernatural impulse* upon their minds leading them to it; when the most that can be said is that, from a pious and good disposition of mind, they are inclined to undertake *that* employment in preference to any other. But in how many cases is it not apparent that even *this* is more than can be asserted with truth; since they chuse *their* business as you do *yours*, with no other view than to get a subsistence by it.

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The oath against *simony* at the institution of the clergy into their benefices, is, I fear, much too strict for the actual practice of many of them. It is as follows, "I, N. N. do swear that I have made no simoniacal payment, contract, or promise, directly or indirectly, by myself or any other, to my knowledge, or with my consent, to any person or persons whatsoever, for, or concerning, the procuring, and obtaining, of this ecclesiastical dignity, place, preferment, office, or living, nor will at any time hereafter perform, or satisfy, any such kind of payment, contract, or promise, made by any other without my knowledge or consent. So help me God through Jesus Christ." Now, besides buying *advowsons* with the *right of presentation*, and then presenting themselves, which is virtually the same thing as purchasing the living, is it not well known that, in various other ways, livings are really purchased, as much as other life estates, and reversions? For my own part, I see no good reason why, considering the rest of the constitution of the church, it might not be permitted to clergymen, properly qualified, to buy places in the church, as well as for officers to buy places in the army. It would certainly be far less scandalous, and in all respects better, than the present practice.

5. The inequality in the provision that is made for the clergy is another great and crying evil in your church, as it both adds to the expence of the system, and is the cause of the clerical duty being worse performed. For in general, the persons who receive the largest salaries do the least duty, being able to get it done for a small allowance by inferior hands; and in some cases the disproportion between the receipts of the person who does nothing, and those of him who does the whole, is enormous and scandalous. Now the question with a sensible and economical people is, whether any kind of duty cannot be as well done at a less expence. If the real duty of any parish be actually done for fifty pounds a year, for example, why should another person enjoy perhaps five hundred for doing nothing? Money

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that might be saved, you know is thrown away, and might be better employed.

We Dissenters think that we manage our affairs much better than you do yours. There are, for example, in this town twelve dissenting ministers of different denominations, who, to the satisfaction of their respective congregations, do the duty of eight places of public worship; and yet all their salaries put together hardly amount to that of the rector of St. Martin's. Now it is not denied that, in this particular case, his assiduity in the care of souls is equal to that of twelve of us; and that, finding himself more than equal to the care of this parish, and having the free offer of another at some distance, he has been encouraged to undertake it; yet this is not to be expected of the ordinary race of men. Mr. Madan is another happy instance within your knowledge of one man being capable of much clerical duty, and having a field of action in some proportion to his exertions. But there are in other parts of the kingdom, clergymen whose characters are less respectable, and whose labours are less incessant, who receive much more for doing much less.

Yet, notwithstanding this abundant provision for the clergy, so unequal is the appropriation of it, that you are often obliged to be at a great additional expence yourselves to have the duty of your churches done to your satisfaction; so that, in many cases, besides what is exacted by law, you pay as much by voluntary contribution as the Dissenters themselves. Ample as is the revenue of the church of St. Martin's, you find it necessary to provide one of the two curates, and to pay him yourselves.

6. *Pluralities and non-residence* are other shameful abuses in your church government, and greater, I believe, than in any Catholic country at this day. That any christian, and especially a christian minister, should be able to satisfy his conscience with this source of wealth (which necessarily deprives others of his brethren of a competent provision) will always be thought impossible by the unprejudiced laity. But, as I would be always understood to say, it is not the
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men, but the *system* that is to be complained of. The *temptation* should be removed, and the law should from time to time define that *decent provision* with which a christian minister, with and without a family, ought to be content ; and if one or two hundred, if four or five hundred, be deemed *sufficient*, no clergyman should, on any pretence whatever, whether as chaplain to a nobleman, or any other, take any livings the income of which should exceed that sum. If that provision will not answer their purpose, let them betake themselves to some more lucrative profession, and not carry their avarice and rapacity into the sanctuary of God.

I fear, however, that the present system, bad as it is, is more agreeable to the generality of the clergy themselves. It is like a *lottery*, in which there are, indeed, many *blanks*, but also many considerable *prizes*, some or other of which every one flatters himself *may* fall to his lot. Many also, no doubt, are, in some sense, proud of the wealth and dignity of their *order*, though they do not themselves partake of it ; as the poorest Frenchmen formerly were proud of their *grand monarque*. You must have heard how an excellent proposal for the equalization of livings, by taking from the rich and giving to the poor, made by the present bishop of Llandaff was rejected some years ago ; and it is not probable that any other proposal, which should have the same object, would be treated in a different manner.

7. The method of providing for the clergy by *tithes* has a great tendency to debase their minds, and to put them on bad terms with their parishioners, by a constant opposition of interests. To prevent this great inconvenience, so as to promote the great ends of the christian ministry, the salaries of the clergy should be absolutely fixed, and be paid in such a manner as to be no obstruction to improvements in agriculture. But this is so far from being the case, that there is no country in christendom in which the maintenance of the clergy is so oppressive to the people as in this. A professor in the university of Palermo, who lately called upon me, said that there are no tithes paid in all Italy or Sicily. In those

countries the clergy are maintained from *church lands*, let out to tenants, like any other lands; and in Holland the clergy are paid from the public treasury, like the officers of the army or navy. In Scotland, I am informed, the tithes are all in lay lands, and are never paid *in kind*, but according to a moderate invariable *modus*.

Indeed, the evil arising from tithes is so great, and striking, that I take it for granted it will not be borne much longer; and a reformation in this respect may draw after it others of more consequence. But for this very reason the friends of the system, that is, all who are *gainers* by it, will be strenuous advocates for their continuance, and for every other abuse, however manifest. It is therefore your business, who suffer by them, to prefer your complaints; and if your applications to the legislature for this purpose were general, your petition would, no doubt, be heard. Meetings for the abolition of tithes, like those for the abolition of the slave trade, begun by reputable persons in any one town in England, would soon spread through the whole, and in due time procure effectual redress of this great and crying evil.

8. The inconvenience of the *spiritual courts* have not come under my cognizance, but I shall recite what bishop Burnet who, no doubt, knew them well, says of them. "As for the ecclesiastical jurisdiction, it has been the burden of my life to see how it was administered. Our courts are managed under the rules of the canon law, dilatory and expensive; and as their constitution is bad, so the business in them is small, and therefore all possible contrivances are used to make the most of those causes that come before them, so that they are universally dreaded and hated. God grant that a time may come in which that noble design, so near being perfected in king Edward the sixth's days, of the *reformatio legum ecclesiasticarum*, may be reviewed and established." Then, shewing the superiority of the discipline of the church of Rome, he says, "but since that is not to be thought of, we are in a
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“woeful condition, in which the clergy are, as it were, shut out from any share of the main parts of the care of souls”.

History of his own Times, vol. IV. p. 411.

9. But, perhaps, the most unfavourable circumstance, of many that are all highly unfavourable, in the situation of your clergy, and what is enough to bias, and pervert, any order of men in the world, is their continually looking for any considerable preferment to the court, which has, directly or indirectly, the disposal of all the bishoprics, and other great livings. This circumstance will give them, even more than themselves can be aware of, a leaning to the measures of the court, which at the same time tends to debase their own characters, by giving them a disposition to servility and flattery, and to give such a weight to the power of the crown as may be inconsistent with the liberties of the people. In these circumstances, even the virtue of the clergy will mislead them; for they will deem it *ingratitude* not to abet the measures of their patrons. Hence the bishops who, if left to themselves, would, no doubt, think as differently from one another as other men do, are well known to vote as uniformly on the side of the court, as the sixteen peers of Scotland, who are in fact chosen by the court.

It is well known that, in the arbitrary reigns of the Stuarts, the great body of the clergy openly preached the doctrines of *passive obedience and non-resistance*, as if, by the constitution, our kings had been arbitrary; and if the spirit of the people had not overruled that of the church, our government would at this day have been as despotic as that of Turkey. The misfortunes of that unhappy family, the Stuarts, are in a great measure to be ascribed to the clergy of their times, who were continually fostering their high notions of *kingly power*, and inculcating those maxims of government which issued in their ruin. In your liturgy, which was composed by clergymen, there is no trace of a *limited monarchy*. The king is always supposed to be *supreme*, and the members of parliament his counsellors; so that you would naturally imagine that he was accountable to

none but God*. Besides, how unfavourable an impression must the prospect of such *temporal elevation* as the bishops attain, by having a seat in the house of lords, have on their own minds; and how must it divert their attention from *spiritual* matters? In the primitive times it was deemed improper for a clergyman to be so much as guardian to a child, because it would involve him in *secular business*, incompatible with his spiritual functions. What, then, would have been thought of placing a bishop in such a situation as ours are in, with a right to speak, and give their votes, in all *affairs of state*, which necessarily implies that they make them their *study*.

This is an enormity unknown in any other protestant church, and what would not have been borne by any christian people in the primitive times.

Were this one manifest and great abuse alone corrected; were the bishops confined to the superintendency of their dioceses in matters *spiritual*, and were, at the same time, an end put to their most indecent *translations* from one bishopric to another (a thing which was always considered as scandalous, and which was very rarely practised, till more than a thousand years after Christ) what a great and happy change would it make in the face of things, temporal and spiritual, in this country. Comfort yourselves, however, with the thought that your children, at least, will see

* The English clergy, like all other bodies of men, have acted different parts, and on different principles, according to their circumstances; having been a controul on the power of the crown when their own influence with the people was sufficiently great for the purpose, and being subservient to the court, when they had no other source of wealth or power. They are characterized in the following manner in the several periods since the Norman conquest by *the Christian Freeholder*, in the *Collection of Testimonies in favour of religious Liberty*, p. 118, "Did not this clergy play the tyrant both over subjects and kings, acknowledge a foreign supremacy, grasp at all property, till the laity checked possessions in mortmain, invade the province of lawyers, oppose the reformation with fire and gibbets, support the Stuarts, obstruct the revolution, countenance several rebellions against the reigning family, and shew such a temper in their convocations, that the crown has never of late permitted their sittings."

this, and many other happy changes in the constitution of their country, and will wonder at the stupidity, and want of spirit, in their ancestors, in bearing such gross abuses so long as they did.

In consequence of these circumstances it is that, notwithstanding many eminent characters among your clergy, several of whom I think myself happy in reckoning among my friends (and it would be extraordinary indeed if such a profession, consisting of more than ten thousand persons, did not produce some such) it is, I believe, universally acknowledged, and lamented, that the generality of the clergy are not much respected in this country, and that in many cases they are extremely disliked; and yet the people bear with them, because they see no easy remedy. In one place where I lived, the behaviour of the officiating clergyman was such, that not a single person would for some time go to hear him. At length, indeed, he was for a short time suspended.

I do not pretend to be myself acquainted with the discipline of foreign churches, but I believe that the officiating clergy are much more respected than they are here, which must be owing to a different and a better system of *government*, because *men* are the same in all countries. The testimony of bishop Burnet is very strong to my purpose, and and no person will say that the qualifications, or morals, of the clergy are improved since his time. "In our church," he says (*History of his own Times*, vol. IV. p. 411) "at present the clergy have less authority, and are under more contempt, than in any church that I have seen." This is accounted for by what he observes, p. 419, "I say it with great regret, I have observed the clergy in all places through which I have travelled, Papists, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Dissenters; but of them all, our clergy are the most remiss in their labours in private, and the least severe in their lives." "Unless" he adds, p. 430, "a better spirit possesses the clergy, arguments, and what is more, laws and authority, will not prove strong enough

"to preserve the church." But thus men will be always served who have no choice of their own servants, and no authority in the conduct of their own affairs.

I shall also subjoin the account that Dr. Hartley, one of the wisest and best of men, a serious member of the church of England, and who has never been accused of want of candour, gives of it in the conclusion of his *Observations on Man*, published A. D. 1749.

"I choose to speak," he says, vol. II. p. 450, "to what falls under the observation of all serious attentive persons in the kingdom. The superior clergy are, in general, ambitious, and eager in the pursuit of riches; flatterers of great, and subservient to party interest; negligent of their their own immediate charges, and also of the inferior clergy, and their immediate charges. The inferior clergy imitate their superiors, and in general take little more care of their parishes than barely what is necessary to avoid the censure of the law. And the clergy of all ranks are in general either ignorant, or, if they do apply, it is rather to profane learning, to philosophical or political matters, than to the study of the scriptures, of the oriental languages, of the Fathers, and ecclesiastical authors, and of the writings of devout men in different ages of the church. I say this is in general the case, i. e. far the greater part of the clergy of all ranks in this kingdom are of this kind. But there are some of a quite different character, men eminent for piety, sacred learning, and the faithful discharge of their duty; and who, it is not to be doubted, mourn in secret for the crying sins of this and other nations. The clergy in general are also far more free from open and gross vices than any other denomination of men among us, physicians, lawyers, merchants, soldiers, &c. However, this may be otherwise hereafter. For it is said that in some foreign countries the superior clergy, in others the inferior, are as corrupt and abandoned, or more so, than any other order of men. The clergy in this kingdom seem to be what one might expect
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“from the mixture of good and bad influences that affect them. But then, if we make this candid allowance for *them*, we must also make it for persons in the higher ranks of life, for their infidelity, lewdness and fordid self-interest. And though it becomes an humble charitable and impartial man to make all these allowances; yet he cannot but see that the judgments of God are ready to fall upon us all for these things; and that they may fall first, and with the greatest weight upon those, who having the highest office committed to them in the spiritual kingdom of Christ neglect it, and are become mere merchants of the earth, and shepherds that feed themselves, and not their flocks.”

That it is the *situation* of the clergy, and nothing else, that makes them to be what they are, you will easily perceive from supposing that all persons belonging to the profession of *medicine* were in the same. In fact, it is *human nature*, which will always be the same thing in the same circumstances.

Suppose, then, that all the physicians and apothecaries of this country were to begin the practice of their professions with only *a classical education*, without any previous study of *medicine*, or knowledge of drugs.

Let it be made perfectly easy for any man who does not like the business to which he was brought up, or in which he does not succeed, to exchange it for the profession of medicine, and immediately commence either physician, or apothecary, as it shall suit his convenience.

Let care, however, be taken that they all subscribe a set of *medical aphorisms*, though they should have had no opportunity even of perusing them; and let the aphorisms be such as have been determined upon by a body of men who were not of the profession, two hundred years ago. Let the subscription be repeated when any physician or apothecary changes his situation.

Let the people of the town where they are appointed to act have no choice respecting them, nor any power of dismissing them.

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Let the salaries of all medical people be paid, if not by tithes, at least in some other manner that shall create an opposition of interest between them and their patients; and whether these be more or fewer, let not their salaries be affected by that circumstance.

Let every physician be allowed the superintendence of more towns than one, according to his interest at court, or with particular patrons; and let him employ, on as cheap terms as they can be procured, whatever *substitutes* he pleases, with power, uncontrouled by his patients, to act in all respects for their principal.

Lastly, in order to do honour to the profession, and to give it such a *respectability* in the eyes of the nation as may be necessary to its having a proper *effect*, let a certain number of the more eminent in the faculty be appointed by the king to have seats in parliament, and to give their advice when any question relating to the *health* of his majesty's subjects shall come before them.

Thus the profession of *medicine* will form an *alliance with the state*, which may be beneficial to both, and for which it has as good pretensions as that of *religion*. This, indeed, seems necessary to complete the *system of alliance*; as then the ministers of state will have in their pay, and in their interest, all those who have the care of both the *bodies* and the *souls* of men, whereas at present, their system is manifestly imperfect.

Let all this be done, and then say what kind of medical assistance could you (observe I do not say the *ministry*, or the *court*, but could *you*) expect from such physicians and apothecaries? You would certainly take from them every motive they could have to give any attention to *you*, because you had made it their interest to be looking always to their *superiors*. In this case, I imagine, you would rather trust yourselves to *nature*, in case of sickness, or to any *empiric* whatever, whom you were permitted to employ, than to such *physicians of the establishment*.

Can you then wonder at the increase of *Dissenters* and *Methodists* of various kinds on the one hand, and of *unbelievers*

lievers on the other, in such a state of things as this? Now, my friends, if you only took the same care of your *souls*, as the phrase is, that you do of your *bodies*, you would see the absurdity of a *state ministry* in the same light with this of *state physicians* and *apothecaries*.

These, my friends, are only a part of the complex system of your church establishment. On which ever side you view it, you will see similar weaknesses, such as, without gunpowder, or any high wind, threaten an approaching fall. The universities, in particular, from which, perhaps with the best intentions with respect to us, you exclude our youth, call most loudly for reformation. But this must be the result of your own thinking and exertions. You must not expect that the clergy will promote any reformation of a system in the continuance of which they are so much *interested*. You must do it *yourselves*, by petitions to the legislature; and if you be in earnest, and any thing like unanimous, you will be heard. Is it not a disgrace to a protestant country, that there should, in so many important respects, be greater abuses in its church government than in that of the Catholics; that our *civil* constitution should be so excellent, and yet its *ally*, as it is called, the *ecclesiastical* part, of the same system, be so imperfect?

The *use* of this expensive system is to provide for the instruction of the country in the principles of christianity; but it by no means answers its end. For it is not one half of the inhabitants that are taught any religion at all. They attend no public worship, and it is not the interest of the clergy to promote their attendance; because their incomes are altogether independent of it. In popish countries the case is far otherwise. In all of *them* care is taken, by one means or other, that every person is instructed in his religion, and every open neglect of the known duties of it is regularly animadverted upon. The state, in my opinion, has no business to meddle with it; but if it pretend to do it at all, and if an order of men be amply provided for on this account, care should be taken that the end of the institution

institution be answered. At present, the whole kingdom is taxed, and in the most inconvenient manner possible, for the maintenance of religion; when, after all, the religion of a very great proportion of those who have any is provided for out of their own private purses, and they who do not chuse to have any, which is the case of the greatest part of both the highest and the lowest classes of the people, are not so much as admonished on the subject.

Whenever the *wants of the state* shall make it necessary to examine strictly into its *resources* and *expenditure*, the great sum that is now given for the maintenance of religion, will either be wholly withdrawn, or care will be taken that it be better applied. Would it not be better, for instance, if the government made some provision for having all the poor taught to read and write; that when, by this means, they had acquired the *civilization*, and capacity for judging, which they now want, they might chuse a religion for themselves, than impose upon them, one which they are not capable of examining. This scheme for communicating *knowledge* in general, would not cost the country one tenth part so much that it now does to have them taught *religion*, which, after all, is not taught to any purpose.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER XXI.

Of the Calumnies contained in a Pamphlet intitled
THEODOSIUS.

My generous Townsmen and Neighbours,

HAVING refuted the calumnies of Mr. Burn, by which he endeavoured to exhibit me as a person who paid no regard to Revelation, and who avowed principles subversive of all moral virtue, I shall, in this Letter, give you an account of an attempt of a similar nature, the object of it being to represent me as an absolute *Atheist*, and a teacher of Atheism to others, when my life has been devoted to the purpose of teaching, from the pulpit and from the press, the principles of natural and revealed religion; and my writings on these subjects are more numerous than those of any person in this, or probably in any other country whatever. The defamatory tale has, however, been eagerly circulated by the clergy, not only of this town and neighbourhood, but by those of higher rank, in London and elsewhere. For a long time I only smiled at the story, and never meant to take any public notice of it. At length, however, I was prevailed upon to make some inquiry into it, and I shall now lay before you the result of that inquiry.

The calumny is contained in a pamphlet intitled, THEODOSIUS, written in the character of an aged clergyman, who says, that he visited Mr. Silas Deane on his death-bed, and then received from him, in a long conversation (the particulars of which are given in the form of a dialogue in five pages, p. 11, &c.) an acknowledgment of his having been taught his Atheistical principles by me*.

* In a Print, intitled, *Sedition and Atheism defeated*, Silas Deane is represented on his death-bed, and a clergyman standing by him, in the attitude of holding up his hands, and saying, *No God! who taught you that*

He also represents many persons, p. 59, as affirming that I am "the most gloomy, the most miserable, and most dissatisfied person in existence; sometimes wearing a face of resignation in public, but unable to conceal the perturbation of my mind in private." "Whether," says this writer, "he is shocked at approaching annihilation; or whether he is but a partial convert to his own system, I cannot determine; but I perfectly coincide in the purport of the Marquis of Lansdown's remonstrance, Sir, said his lordship, speaking to Dr. Priestley, *were you sincerely satisfied of the truth of your theory, you could not be that wretched desponding man you constantly appear to be when withdrawn from the public eye.*"

Lastly, he says, p. 26, "When a Socinian minister, like Dr. Priestley, has the temerity to attack the christian religion from the pulpit and the press, in terms of insult and abhorrence*; when he affirms in language that cannot be mistaken, that the Virgin Mary is a whore, and the Redeemer a bastard, I feel an honest indignation in my breast, and conceive forbearance is criminal."

In a Note to this writer's narrative, concerning the death of Silas Deane, p. 13, he says, "I desire to be unknown, nor will I gratify idle curiosity, but if any respectable character doubt the truth of this narrative, I will refer him to a clergyman of established reputation, who was an auricular witness of the same language, and of the same avowal from this deluded man. A line directed for the author, to be left at Mr. Buckland's till called for, will meet with due attention."

that doctrine? while the dying man replies, *Dr. Priestley*. This compartment in the print is called, *The death bed avowal of Silas Deane*, to which is annexed the following Note. "The particulars of this awful and interesting conversion to Atheism, may be seen in a pamphlet intitled, *Theodosius*, and sold with or without the print."

* I should think that malice itself could not be so credulous as to believe that any society of *christians* would bear their minister in his "attacks on the christian religion" from their pulpit, even without "terms of insult and abhorrence."

You

You will naturally imagine that a story so circumstantially told must at least have some foundation in fact, though greatly misconceived and misrepresented. But I will venture to say it has none at all, and that, strange as it may appear, and difficult to account for, it is, in all its parts, an absolute invention of the writer.

Being in London in April last, and finding that Mr. Buckland abovementioned had returned all the copies of the pamphlet that were sent to him (thinking it disreputable to have any concern in such a publication) I left the following letter for the Author with Mr. G. Bourne, another of the publishers, in Panton-street, Hay-Market.

‘REV SIR, *No. 72. St. Paul’s Church Yard, April 15, 1790.*

‘As, in your Note, p. 12, you say that, “if any respectable character doubt the truth of your narrative” about Silas Deane and myself, “you will refer him to a clergyman of established reputation,” I take the liberty to request an interview with that clergyman.

‘I am, &c.

‘J. PRIESTLEY.’

To this I received the following answer:

‘REV. SIR,

‘I am favoured with your letter of the 15th instant. My answer will appear in a few days from the press: for I conceive the affair of Silas Deane to be of too serious and important a nature to be discussed by private interview. The business is before the public; and by public decision, Sir, you must stand or fall.

‘A copy of my answer shall be sent conformably to your directions the moment it is struck off. Mean while I remain,

Sir,

‘Your obedient servant,

‘Sunday, P. M.

THEODOSIUS.’

I then

I then wrote as follows :

‘ REV. SIR,

‘ As you propose to answer my letter from the press,
‘ I must take the farther liberty to desire you would produce
‘ your authority for the remonstrance of the Marquis of
‘ Lansdown, p. 59, and also for the opprobrious language
‘ which you ascribe to me concerning Jesus Christ and the
‘ Virgin Mary, p. 27. I am, &c.’

‘ P. S. In your printed answer I shall expect to find the
‘ name of *the clergyman of established reputation* to whom
‘ you referred.’

Having waited a full *month* for an answer which was
promised in a *few days*, and being returned to Birmingham,
I wrote again as follows :

‘ REV. SIR,

Birmingham, May 17, 1790.

‘ In yours, which I received the 17th of last
‘ month, you promised me an answer from the press to one
‘ that I wrote the 15th, *in a few days*, and said that you
‘ would send it the moment that it was struck off ; I have
‘ not yet received any such answer, and shall be glad to
‘ know when I may expect it. I am, &c.’

To this I did not receive any answer ; but, in the mean
time, being informed that Dr. Bancroft, with whom I had
formerly some acquaintance, knew more of Mr. Deane
than any other person in this country, I wrote to him as
follows :

‘ DEAR SIR,

‘ As I am informed that no person in England was
‘ better acquainted with Mr. Silas Deane, his sentiments,
‘ and his affairs, than yourself, I shall take it as a favour if
‘ you will give me your opinion of the probability of the
‘ account of his death in the pamphlet intitled *Theodosius*.

I am, &c.’

To

To this the Doctor sent me the following answer :

‘ DEAR SIR,

“ I AM favoured with your letter, requesting my opinion of the probability of the account of Mr. Silas Deane’s death as related in a pamphlet intitled *THEODOSIUS*,” and mentioning as the motive of this request, that you have been “ informed that no person in England was better acquainted with Mr. Deane, his sentiments and affairs than myself :” ‘ This, indeed, is a fact which has been sufficiently known, and was a consequence of my having been partly educated under him ; and also of a particular instruction given to him by the secret committee of congress when he was sent to Europe by that body in 1776.

‘ The account of Mr. Deane’s death is comprehended in that part of the pamphlet which the author calls his “ Narrative ;” ‘ the truth of which he “ solemnly affirms,” and stakes upon it his hope of “ divine protection and support in time and eternity.” ‘ The first part of this narrative chiefly relates to a letter which Mr. Deane is supposed to have written to Mr. de Sartine, then minister of the marine department in France, “ solemnly protesting that he would propose terms of accommodation to England if a *declaration* of immediate support were not signed by France in eight and forty hours ;” ‘ together with a conversation which is said to have passed between Dr. Franklin and Mr. Deane, respecting that letter ; and a subsequent interview with Mr. de Sartine, for which the American commissioners are supposed to have been hurried away at midnight, to a villa, that he is said to have had, about five leagues from Paris ; where “ the fatal declaration” is alledged to have been “ instantly signed.”

‘ The situation in which I lived, under the same roof with Dr. Franklin, and Mr. Deane, when these transactions are supposed to have happened, and the intimate knowledge I had of every thing which passed between them and the French ministry, intitle me to decide respecting the truth of this part of the author’s narrative ; and on these grounds

N

‘ I do

‘ I do not hesitate in pronouncing it to be an absurd fiction ;
‘ confident as I am that Mr. Deane’s official intercourse in
‘ France never was at any time, or upon any occasion, with
‘ Mr. de Sartine, or any body in his department ; that no
‘ such letter was ever written, nor any declaration of support
‘ ever required by any American commissioner, and signed
‘ by any French minister, before the treaty of amity and
‘ commerce, and that of eventual alliance, were actually con-
‘ cluded, on the 6th of February, 1778.

‘ The other part of the author’s narrative begins with these
‘ words, viz. “ The last time I saw Mr. Silas Deane was
‘ on a bed of sickness and *death* ; he sent for me.”—“ and
‘ then the author proceeds to state a conversation which he
‘ says passed between himself and Mr. Deane, and in which
‘ the latter, on his *death* bed, is made to “ *deny the existence*
‘ “ *of a deity* ;” “ and being desired to “ name the wretch,”
‘ who had infused into his mind “ such horrid blasphemies”
‘ is said to have named Dr. Priestley ; and to have added,
‘ “ yes, Dr. Priestley was my instructor, my saviour, and my
‘ “ God.”—

‘ That you, Sir, may be able to judge of the probability of
‘ this account, I need only say, that Mr. Deane left Lon-
‘ don, in a post chaise, on Tuesday the 22d. of September
‘ last, with captain Davis of the Boston packet, in which
‘ ship he was to embark for America, and from the captain’s
‘ *written account of his death*, it appears, that after sleeping
‘ that night at Gravesend, Mr. Deane made a hearty break-
‘ fast there the next morning, at the house of captain Davis’s
‘ father in law ; and afterwards went on board with the
‘ captain, when the ship immediately took her departure ;
‘ that about ten o’clock the same morning, whilst Mr.
‘ Deane was walking on the quarter deck, with the captain,
‘ he suddenly complained of being unwell, and this com-
‘ plaint increasing very fast, he was taken down into the ca-
‘ bin, and there *for the first and only time*, was laid on *his*
‘ *death bed*, or the bed on which he died ; and that he there
‘ almost immediately became *speechless*, and continued so
‘ until his death, which happened about two o’clock in the
‘ afternoon

‘afternoon of the same day. The captain mentions the several persons who were with Mr. Deane whilst on his *death bed*, who appear all to have belonged to the ship, and all of them incapable of comprehending any of his inarticulate sounds, when he once or twice attempted to speak, whilst on his *death bed*.—Mr. Deane had, indeed, formerly been attacked by a complication of disorders, but he had been gradually recovering from them, for more than eighteen months before his death: and during the time when he might be said to have lain on a bed of “*sickness*,” though not of “*death*” his mental faculties were so much impaired, that he must have been incapable of that part of the conversation which has been ascribed to him.

‘There are other facts also which concur to make this conversation altogether incredible. I do not believe that Mr. Deane would have been more open upon religious subjects with an aged clergyman, such as Theodosius describes himself, than he was with me; and I certainly never heard him intimate, much less profess, any disbelief “of the existence of a deity.” ‘Doubts he may have had of revealed religion, but these I am persuaded were neither produced, nor increased, by any person in this country. On the contrary, I believe, and on very good grounds, that the religious sentiments which he entertained in the latter part of his life, were exactly the same, as those which he had avowed in France to several of his friends, before he ever saw either England or yourself.

‘This statement of facts, I think due to you, Sir, as well as to truth, and the memory of Mr. Deane, and I cannot object to its being used where it can be of service to either, though I certainly am very far from wishing to attract any share of public attention to myself. I have the honour to be, with great esteem,

‘Dear Sir,

‘Your most humble

‘And obedient servant,

‘Francis-street, Bedford Square,

‘May 8th, 1790.’

‘EDWARD BANCROFT.’

This, I imagine, will satisfy any reasonable person, that the whole of the narrative in THEODOSIUS, though published with such uncommonly solemn asseveration, is nothing else than a malicious fabrication ; and it is certainly such an impudent one as, I believe, few persons can recollect any example of. But I leave the subject to the reflection of the writer, if he be capable of any, and to that of you, my readers, who, I am sure, will lament over this instance of the extreme depravity of human nature, both with respect to the person who could invent and publish such a story, and those who have taken so much pleasure in propagating it.

My acquaintance with Mr. Deane, began with his seeking mine. With this view, being at Birmingham, on a Sunday, he attended the place of worship where I preach, and there happening to meet my brother-in-law Mr. William Wilkinson, whom he had seen abroad, he was by him introduced to me. After this I saw him at different times and places, and was much pleased with his conversation ; which will not be thought extraordinary, as he is well known to have been a very intelligent man, and particularly well acquainted with the history of the American war, which interests the curiosity of every Englishman, and I found him very communicative on the subject. But I never exchanged a word with him on the subject of *religion*. I very well knew that he was an unbeliever in christianity ; but so are many of my acquaintance, on whom I never unnecessarily obtrude the topic, though I do not wish to decline it whenever it happens to be introduced.

Mentioning this affair of Mr. Deane to Mr. Benjamin Vaughan, an old pupil of mine (the person to whom I dedicated my *Lectures on History and General Policy*) and he being able to corroborate the evidence of Dr. Bancroft, with the addition of some other particulars relating to the accusation, you will excuse my inserting some extracts from his letter on the subject, though too flattering to me.

My

‘ *London, May 20, 1790.*

‘ MY DEAR SIR,

‘ I readily perform my promise respecting the charges brought against you by the writer of the pamphlet under the signature of *Theodosius*.

‘ I first saw Mr. Silas Deane at Paris in the winter of 1775-6, and again in the summer of 1777; and I certainly conceived, from the tenor of his conversation, that he was then no believer in christianity. He appeared to me not only a free thinker, but in some respects a free liver.

‘ When your acquaintance with Mr. Deane commenced, which was on his coming to England, I apprehend that little remained to be taught him on the subject of *deism*, especially after his long residence in the midst of many deistical writers and connections at Paris. I do not suppose that he ever was an *Atheist*, though the above pamphlet imputes *this* to him. My reasons are, that he did not want understanding, and that one of his intimate friends, with whom he was far less likely to use reserve, than with persons of the description alluded to by Theodosius, had no sort of reason to suspect it.

‘ The want of religion ascribed to Mr. Deane, whatever was the degree of it, is not stiled by your accuser as originating, from any communications and conferences on your part which were of a *private* nature: and it is indeed very unlikely that you should communicate to Mr. Deane any thing, which you were fearful of publishing.—The tendency of your *publications* is a separate question, which is open to the decision of every one.

‘ If it had ever been your intention to make converts to deism or atheism, I, who have been your pupil, and known so many of your pupils, and who have been your intimate friend, and have known so many of your intimate friends, must have seen or heard of traces of it in a character so little disguised as yours. But I have done neither; and the same I am persuaded will be found to be the case with your other pupils and friends; and I cannot conceive why it

‘ can be thought probable, that you should single out a
 ‘ stranger, to place a trust in him capable of being rendered
 ‘ so fatal to your character, profession, and repose.

‘ This is more than you appear to have done to Mr.
 ‘ Deane’s countryman, Dr. Franklin, with whom you have
 ‘ been in great habits of confidence and friendship. I judge
 ‘ that you never attempted this in *his* case from a passage
 ‘ in a letter which I received some time ago from that ad-
 ‘ mirable man, whose knowledge of human nature and
 ‘ whose sincerity on this occasion, none can dispute. He
 ‘ expresses himself as follows.— “Remember me affection-
 ‘ ately to the honest heretic Dr. Priestley. I do not call
 ‘ him *honest* by way of distinction; for I think all the he-
 ‘ retics I have known have been virtuous men: they have
 ‘ the virtue of *fortitude*, or they would not venture to own
 ‘ their heresy; and they cannot afford to be deficient in
 ‘ any of the other virtues, as they would give advantage to
 ‘ their many enemies; and they have not, like orthodox sin-
 ‘ ners, such a number of friends to excuse or justify them.—
 ‘ Do not however, mistake me. It is not to my good
 ‘ friend’s heresy that I impute his honesty: on the con-
 ‘ trary, it is his honesty that has brought on him the charac-
 ‘ ter of heresy.”

‘ The good humour which accompaniess every thing that
 ‘ falls from Dr. Franklin, will readily assure you that he uses
 ‘ the word *heretic* and *heresy* in no individuou sense, but
 ‘ only in allusion to the charges on this subject which have
 ‘ frequently been brought against you, and to which you
 ‘ are no stranger.

‘ As to your manners in private, which have been criti-
 ‘ cized by Theodosius, I presume myself competent, from a
 ‘ familiar acquaintance with you during the greatest part of
 ‘ my life, and a long residence with you at different times
 ‘ and places under the same roof, to deny that they partake
 ‘ in any degree whatever of “gloom” ‘ In opposition to the
 ‘ statement in his pamphlet, I not only apprehend that you
 ‘ have no habitual gloom about you, but that you are
 ‘ usually

‘ usually most chearful in very small domestic societies,
‘ though frequently grave in large companies, unless parti-
‘ cularly interested, or called forth.

‘ For myself, I have to return you thanks for many agree-
‘ able and chearful moments spent in your society; and
‘ your talents for pleasantry I apprehend, are not unknown
‘ also to some of your opponents.—But I am happily
‘ bound to you by ties of a more *serious* nature. Inde-
‘ pendent of your kind and constant friendship to me, and
‘ the cultivation you have endeavoured to give to my mind
‘ upon general subjects, which I shall seek some better oc-
‘ casion to acknowledge; you have constantly laboured to
‘ confirm and encourage my general faith in religion. Per-
‘ haps the time is at hand, when I shall have the means of
‘ proving that your zeal has not been unprofitably bestowed
‘ upon me in this last and most important object.

‘ I need not add, therefore, with how much gratitude and
‘ respect it is,

‘ that I remain your affectionate friend,

‘ BENJAMIN VAUGHAN.’

By the refutation of this, which is the most important part of the story, and the truth of which the author asserts with the greatest air of solemnity, you may form some judgment of the probability of the other articles. The reader may, if he pleases, apply to the marquis of Lansdown, with respect to his expostulation with me, on *the gloominess of my temper*, about which I do not think it worth while to trouble his lordship. On the contrary, every person who knows much of me, will bear witness, that my temper is more even, and perhaps more chearful, than that of most men. Let my hearers be applied to as to what I *preach*, and my *publications* are open to all the world. It is my opinion, for which I have given my reasons at large, that Jesus was the legitimate son of Joseph and Mary. But this is, surely, a very different thing from making him a *bastard*, and his mother a *whore*.

From what I have advanced on this subject, you will not, I hope, be so ready to believe other stories, of which many are current, that are propagated to my prejudice, some of them slightly mentioned in the Preface to my *Letters to Mr. Burn*, though I should not take any pains to trace the origin of them, as I have done with respect to *this*, and as I did once before, with respect to my being accused of declaring that "I would never rest till I had pulled down that impostor Jesus Christ," which was formerly as widely and as eagerly circulated as this story of *Theodosius*. Many other calumnies, I doubt not, are circulated to my prejudice, which have not come to my hearing, though they may to yours. With respect to these, I must trust to your candour, and that of the public at large; hoping that you will not hastily give credit to any such assertions, however confidently advanced, since nothing can be more so than these which I have investigated, and have found destitute of all foundation.

Having shewn this story of *Theodosius* to be nothing but a malicious fiction, you will naturally wish to know who is the author of it. To my great surprise, it has been very generally ascribed to Mr. Wesley. But he is certainly incapable of any such thing. Much as I differ from Mr. Wesley in *religious sentiments*, I have the highest opinion of his *integrity*, and I consider his services to christianity as of more importance than those of many benches of bishops. I doubt not he intends great good, and in my opinion he will be the cause, in the hands of providence, of much more good than he intends, or wishes. Time, which brings most things to light, may perhaps reveal this *deed of darkness*. It is sufficient for me at present to shew that, whoever be guilty of the atrocious deed, *I*, against whom it is levelled, am innocent. I can only pray, as I sincerely do, that whoever he be, he may repent, and, as an evidence of true repentance, make his acknowledgment as public as his crime. I shall then forgive him. The most probable opinion is, that *Theodosius* is a clergyman of the church of England, who formerly wrote me a confidential letter, which I yet preserve.

I am, &c.

LETTER XXII.

The Conclusion.

My Friends and Neighbours,

I HAVE now exerted my best endeavours to repel an unprovoked attack upon myself, and my brethren, the Dissenters of this country, made by Mr. Madan, and also to refute the gross calumnies of Mr. Burn, two of your *spiritual guides*, but whose example I hope you will now see no inducement to follow. They have brought *railing* and unjust *accusations* against persons who neither did, nor meant, them any harm, and who lived quietly in their neighbourhood. You have seen the injustice and folly of their own various charges, and those of other persons which have been industriously propagated; and I hope that for the future they will learn to pay a greater regard to truth and justice, and that you will see reason to respect those whom they have endeavoured to exhibit as the objects of your aversion and abhorrence.

Truth is sure to be a gainer by every open discussion, and will, no doubt, be so by *this*; not perhaps in any great degree at present, but always after due reflection. If you have received either *information*, or *amusement*, from these Letters of mine, please to remember that you are primarily indebted to Mr. Madan and Mr. Burn for it, and do not fail to make them a suitable acknowledgement. For certainly their publications gave occasion to mine.

As to myself, if, as Mr. Madan says, controversy be necessary to my *support*, if not to my *existence*, I am obliged to him, and to Mr. Burn, for the satisfaction that I most of all wanted, and (by giving me an additional degree of animation) for prolonging my life. It was, I ought to suppose,
their

their pure good will to me that prompted them to give me this *exercise*, so necessary to my health and happiness.

It is possible also that Mr. Pitt, and those whom we have generally considered as the enemies of the Dissenters, may have given us our late defeat with the most friendly intentions, viz. to promote the discussion of important topics, and to keep up a controversy in which they see we take so much pleasure. For had we gained our point, we must, in common decency, have been quiet at least ten or a dozen years; which, besides ill suiting such *restless spirits* as I, and some others, are represented to be, would have stifled in their very conception a number of excellent publications, with which, I doubt not, the press will now teem for years to come.

However, as the best way to come at a thorough good understanding is sometimes to begin with a full discussion of all our differences (and I hope I am not prone to bear malice) my several antagonists and myself may, by this means, come to understand one another better than we otherwise could have done, and thus be better friends, than before.

In settling the account between us I have more to forgive than they have. For I have never taxed them with *malice*, or *wilful misrepresentation*, which they have perpetually laid to my charge, as if they were words of course, without which controversy could not be carried on; like the phrase *at the instigation of the devil*, in all indictments for felony; and I am willing to hope that, being unused to controversy, they did not consider them in any other light. All that I have to ask pardon for, is a little innocent, and as they will call it, awkward, *pleasantry*, like that of the ass in the fable, such as can do them no material harm; and therefore I hope that, after some time, we shall meet on, at least, as friendly terms as ever.

A good lady who wrote me an anonymous and scolding letter, on the idea, as she said, that, being unworthy of the castigation of any *man*, the pen of a *woman* was more properly

perly employed, began her curious letter with saying, that I "seized on Mr. Madan as a cat seizes on a mouse." But if she had recollected that both Mr. Madan and Mr. Burn were the *aggressors* in this controversy*, she would have seen that they considered themselves as the cats, and me as the defenceless mouse. However, if they have found themselves mistaken, and see reason to think, with my anonymous correspondent, that I am the cat and they the mice, I hope they will be satisfied that, though I have played with them a little, I have done them no material injury (such as they would have done to me) but have taught them for the future not wantonly to provoke other animals of prey, more savagely disposed than myself.

It is true I am an avowed enemy to the *church establishment* of this country, but by no means to any who belong to it. I write against *Calvinism*, but have the greatest respect for many *Calvinists*, and wish to make them exchange their *darkness* for my *light*. I am also an enemy to *Atheism* and *Deism*, but not to *Atheists* or *Deists*. I have a particular friendship for many of them, in this country and other countries, and I write in order to inform and reclaim them. There is nothing *personal* in all this. They think as unfavourably of my *system*, as I do of theirs. Let all points of difference be freely discussed. Truth will be a gainer by it. But let us respect *one another*, as we respect *truth* itself; love all, and wish the good of all, without distinction. This is true candour, and consistent with the greatest zeal for our particular opinions.

* Mr. Madan, and the Rector of St. Martin's, out of their abundant zeal, went about the country, I am informed, like two ecclesiastical knights errant, in order to collect as great a force as they could of the genuine friends of the establishment, on a late occasion at Warwick. If, therefore, the church of England, on any future emergency, shall want *two champions*, either to take the *field*, or to take the *pen*, she may know where to look for them. It is something remarkable that the freeholders of Warwickshire were among the foremost in their addresses to procure a repeal of the bill in favour of the Jews, in 1753. Must every thing narrow and illiberal originate in this part of the country? Let us exert ourselves to wipe off the disgrace.

To

To close with seriousness: I hope that, on reflection, we shall all take more pleasure in exerting our endeavours to promote the knowledge and practice of the great things in which we and all christians agree, than in contending about the things of comparatively small importance with respect to which we differ; as I formerly told the excellent bishop of Waterford, with whom I had a friendly controversy about the duration of our Saviour's ministry; and with what I observed to him on the subject (as my publications of this kind will hardiy ever fall into your hands) I shall close these Letters.

" Your lordship is pleased to speak of our ' differing in
 " some conclusions of greater importance than those we are
 " now controverting.' Of this I am fully apprized; the
 " articles of your lordship's faith, as a member of the
 " church of England, being upon record, and mine being
 " sufficiently known by my writings, as also the stress I lay
 " upon them, as opposed to the tenets of all the established
 " churches in the world. Yet, my lord, it gives me more
 " pleasure to reflect that, notwithstanding these very con-
 " siderable differences, there are still greater things in which
 " we both agree, and on which we both, I hope, lay still
 " greater stress; and they are things in which all persons
 " who call themselves christians are agreed.

" We both believe in a God, the intelligent author of
 " nature, in his constant over-ruling providence, and in his
 " righteous moral government. We both believe in the
 " divine origin of the Jewish and Christian revelations; that
 " Christ was a teacher sent from God, that he is our
 " Master, lawgiver, and judge, that God raised him from
 " the dead, that he is now exalted at the right hand of
 " God, that he will come again to raise all the dead, and
 " sit in judgment upon them, and that he will then give
 " to every one of us according to our works.

" These, I need not tell your lordship, are, properly
 " speaking, the only *great truths of religion*; because they
 " are those which have the greatest influence on our con-
 " duct,

“duſt, and to theſe not only the church of England, and
“the church of Scotland, but even the church of Rome,
“gives its aſſent. If we ſufficiently attend to the im-
“portance of theſe great truths, and give ourſelves up to
“the full influence of them, we ſhall love as brethren, not-
“withſtanding all leſſer differences, and eſpecially ſuch as
“we are now diſcuſſing.

“Whether our Lord preached one year or three years,
“three years or thirty years, we are perfectly agreed with
“reſpect to the great object of his preaching, and the obli-
“gation we are under to regulate our lives according to it ;
“and from the catalogue of proper chriſtian virtues we can
“never exclude *humility, benevolence, or candour*. We muſt
“judge others as we would be judged ourſelves, waiting
“for the final ſentence of our great and common Judge,
“Jeſus Chriſt.”

Hoping we ſhall all adopt theſe truly chriſtian ſentiments,
and that nothing that Mr. Madan, or Mr. Burn have ſaid,
or can have to ſay, will make you loſe ſight of them, and
induce you to think worſe of the principles of any chriſ-
tians, than reaſon and candour require,

I am,
My friends and Neighbours,
Your very humble ſervant,
J. PRIESTLEY.

Birmingham,
June 7, 1790.

POSTSCRIPT.

POSTSCRIPT.

Of the Author's Intercourse with the late Mr. Badcock.

As the name of *Mr. Badcock*, who has engaged much of the public attention, in consequence of his writing against me, has been mentioned in these Letters, and they are sufficiently miscellaneous to admit of it, I shall take this opportunity of gratifying the curiosity of some of my readers by the following brief account of my intercourse with him.

My knowledge of *Mr. Badcock* began by his being a writer in the *Theological Repository*, when I was at Leeds. This leading to a various correspondence, no person ever shewed a stronger attachment to another than he did to me for several years; and on my removal to Calne, in Wiltshire, he made a journey of near one hundred miles on purpose to see me. I was then printing my answer to the Scotch writers, on the subject of their principle of *Common Sense*; and into all my views on this, and every question of a *metaphysical* or *theological* nature, he entered with great spirit. He made no pretensions to *philosophy*, or what is usually called *learning*, but in conversation, and ready animated composition, he excelled greatly. One of his letters to me I had occasion to publish in a late Gentleman's Magazine, as a proof of his attachment to me, and of his concurrence with me in theological sentiments, and I shall insert it here.

‘DEAR SIR,

Barnstable, Dec. 23, 1774.

‘I received your letter with peculiar pleasure; but
 ‘was concerned to hear of your illness. May God preserve
 ‘your valuable life, and make it still a blessing to the world!
 ‘Your being so shocked at the abject superstition of the
 ‘Papists was what might be expected from one whose con-
 ‘tempt for folly had not totally swallowed up zeal for truth,
 ‘and pity for the deluded. A man of mere wit would have
 ‘given an outlet to his indignation by ridicule, which, in some
 cases,

‘ cases, is an excellent medicine to carry off the humours
‘ which nonsense and absurdity breed round the heart. But
‘ the pious and compassionate mind finds exercise for other
‘ passions, when the object is of such infinite importance as
‘ religion. The bare disguise of it might of itself excite
‘ laughter. But, when we reflect on *what* is disguised, and
‘ how serious the consequences are, the tear of pity is justly
‘ demanded ; and it is a tribute the true christian ought not
‘ to deny to his poor benighted fellow-creatures. We have
‘ the best example to recommend it ; even that of the bene-
‘ volent Jesus, who wept for a city wedded to error, and
‘ devoted to destruction, as the awful consequence of its
‘ obstinacy and blindness. You remind me of St. Paul at
‘ Athens, whose spirit was moved when he beheld that
‘ in all things it was too superstitious.”

‘ You very affectionately enquire into my situation with
‘ my people. Some give me uneasiness, and, I believe, would
‘ do every thing in their power to distress me, or injure me.
‘ I never preach upon any subject of a disputable nature.
‘ But this, with many, is a bare negative qualification. “ He
‘ that is not for us is against us,” “ is their constant lan-
‘ guage. I am obliged to avoid their company, as I always
‘ meet with something or other which gives me pain. One
‘ or two have begun to withdraw their subscriptions ; and
‘ I am threatened by others with a separation. The male-
‘ contents have not number or power to support a divided
‘ interest. I have desired those who are discontented to
‘ withdraw, and leave me with my friends in quiet. But
‘ their aim is, to infuse jealousies into others of greater conse-
‘ quence, and thus weary me out by complaints, or drive
‘ me out by mere force.

‘ I saw their design most plainly this very week. I was
‘ desired to use the Doxologies, as my predecessor used to
‘ do, both in prayer and singing. I told them, I would
‘ keep to the words of scripture, knowing that would be
‘ most acceptable to God, and safest for man. They then
‘ insisted on my teaching the *Assembly's Catechism*. This at
‘ once, without hesitation, I positively refused. They asked
me

‘ me the reason. I told them, I had not only objections to
 ‘ many of its principles, but thought it absurd to teach chil-
 ‘ dren a system of religion that contains in it many points of
 ‘ abstruse, speculative, and disputable Theology. This posi-
 ‘ tive and explicit refusal hath, I believe, totally confirmed
 ‘ their suspicions of my heterodoxy.

‘ What the consequences will be, I know not. This is
 ‘ my consolation,—that nothing can eventually harm me if I
 ‘ am a follower of that which is good. I will maintain my
 ‘ independency, and hope never to violate my honesty. It
 ‘ distresses me beyond measure to think that I cannot wholly
 ‘ and unreservedly speak out the sentiments of my mind. I
 ‘ would mingle prudence with innocence, and keep peace
 ‘ with man and conscience; but if a sacrifice is demanded,
 ‘ I hope I shall not hesitate which to make the victim. I
 ‘ wish to be settled among a people of more uniformity of
 ‘ sentiment, and more liberal-mindedness. It is odious to
 ‘ walk about in fetters. I should grieve to see the congre-
 ‘ gation lessened by my means. If they could be united in
 ‘ one more universally liked, I would willingly resign, though
 ‘ I should have no place in view. Yet there are numbers
 ‘ who would grieve to lose me. I thank God that I have
 ‘ been enabled to maintain a consistency of character, and
 ‘ that I have not forfeited the esteem of one person through
 ‘ a defect in duty, moral or religious. With this thought
 ‘ I bear up, and hope boldly to meet the worst.

‘ I have not been able to recover any more of Mr.
 ‘ Wesley’s letters. The lady in whose possession they were
 ‘ died soon after my return from Calne. Her husband fled
 ‘ to Ireland for some misdemeanor, and hath not appeared
 ‘ since. I hear the goods are to be sold soon. If I can
 ‘ meet with any more of the letters, you may depend upon
 ‘ their being sent. As the lady before her death made me
 ‘ a present of what papers she had, I lay claim to those
 ‘ letters as my own. She said, I was welcome to any.—
 ‘ I beg you will not give yourself the trouble of transcribing
 ‘ the letters on the apparition. Take the original. You

‘ are

‘are welcome to it. Did I leave a sermon or two behind me? I wish you would enquire, and send them to me as soon as possible. I want them much.

‘I communicated some account of the Wesley family to the Westminster Magazine. I intended to have continued it, but desisted from my design. I have sent it you. The *Analysis upon Bonds* in mine too. It was an academical maggot.

‘I asked you for that amiable lady Mrs Jones. Do not fail to let me know in your next.—Mrs. Davy begs her compliments to Mrs. Priestley. We often talk of her with great pleasure; and I am glad there is one in this county that knows her, for I am very fond of talking of those whom I esteem and love. Please to remember me to Mrs. P. and family, and always think of me in the amiable light of a sincere and affectionate friend.

‘S. BADCOCK.’

‘My respects to Mr. Williams. I hope he is well.

‘P. S. I have lent your *Institutes* to a sensible and religious Rabbi, bred at the University of Halle. He hath read them with great care, and taken curious extracts from them. The clergyman of the parish warned him of the danger of your works, and abused me for lending them to a Jew. The latter had sense enough to despise him, and told him that, as long as christianity was thought contradictory to the first law of judaism, the conversion of his brethren would be impossible. The parson wants to baptize him. The Rabbi said, that religion was a serious matter, and that he would be a convert in reality before he would be one in profession. He hath been much with me. I hope to be able to send you a pleasing account of him.’

A poem in praise of me (in imitation of Horace's *Integer vitæ scelerisque, purus*) he published in the Westminster Magazine for May 1774. It begins thus:

- ‘ The man whose noble heart disdains
- ‘ A sordid education’s chains,
- ‘ And free from superstition’s load,
- ‘ Obeys, and still enjoys, his God ;
- ‘ Needs neither pope’s, nor bishop’s blessing,
- ‘ To fix that peace his heart’s at rest in ;
- ‘ And asks divinity alone
- ‘ To teach him what to do, or shun.’

Having with much humour described various classes of christians (in which those who are generally termed *orthodox* are not spared) he thus introduces *the clergy*,

- ‘ Place me with men ecclesiastic,
- ‘ Who to the church for living fast stick.
- ‘ And think us fools who will not eat
- ‘ The ready cook’d and carved meat,
- ‘ Which Queen Eliza, that she-bishop,
- ‘ Took so much pains to dress and dish up.’

He thus describes the *orthodox popular preachers*.

- ‘ Place me among the sons of thunder,
- ‘ Who roar to make the vulgar wonder,
- ‘ And stare, and stamp, and damn, in nonsense,
- ‘ To wake the devil in the conscience ;
- ‘ Or those soft sons of consolation,
- ‘ Who whine out tidings of salvation,
- ‘ And lull their auditors asleep
- ‘ By telling them that grace is cheap,
- ‘ And may be had without much trouble ;
- ‘ For works are all an empty bubble :
- ‘ But *splendid sins* are best to cover
- ‘ A heart by nature foul all over.’

He

He then closes the whole as follows :

‘ With any, or with all these, fix me,
‘ Tho’ impudence and nonsense vex me,
‘ Yet still I hope to keep my temper,
‘ The man——the christian *idem semper*;
‘ Nor ever swerve from truth or love,
‘ Nor in the serpent lose the dove;
‘ Nor fear to say to this, or ’tother,
‘ I’m Dr. Priestley’s friend and brother.

Alas! how changeable was this *idem semper*. With respect to his *principles*, however, I fear he never changed. *These* and his *conduct* were, unhappily, at variance.

Even after our public controversy; having occasion to write to me about the publication of some letters relating to Mr. Wesley, which he had formerly given me, he expressed himself as follows: “ You will, I hope, excuse the trouble I give you by this line. I mean not to give the slightest offence, by presuming to caution a man, whom I never scruple to acknowledge to be my superior in every qualification, but the honest wish of doing what is right, and correcting what is wrong; and here, Sir, I yield to no man, and here only think myself your equal.” This letter is dated July 7, 1785.

In the last letter that I received from him before our difference he informed me, that he was suffering under a *calumny*, which would probably oblige him to leave Barnstable, and begged that I would recommend him as a tutor in some nobleman’s family. Having no suspicion what the case really was (as I had no other correspondent in that part of the country) I wrote him a letter of christian and philosophical consolation; observing, that I had myself suffered by many calumnies, and that he must learn to disregard them, as I did. However, the thing appearing to be no calumny, he being obliged to leave his place in consequence of it, and no dissenting minister noticing him afterwards, he never answered my letter, and I did not think proper to renew the correspondence.

Some years after this, finding that he had no resource among Dissenters, and being much caressed by the clergy, and gentlemen of fortune in the establishment, he conformed to the church of England; and with a view, I doubt not, of drawing more attention upon himself, and getting preferment, he adopted the measure of writing against me. But not succeeding in that, or in his views of rising in the church, I much suspect that, extremely irritable as he naturally was, impatient of neglect, and full of ambition, the disappointment contributed to shorten his life.

He had an ardent mind, and was certainly capable of great things; but giving way to his passions, he got into a labyrinth from which he was never able to extricate himself. He certainly made a sacrifice of his integrity on that great altar (with thirty nine horns) on which have been offered thousands of such expensive victims, and on which, it is to be feared, that many more such will be offered before it receives the fate of the altar at Bethel, which is certainly reserved for it. May the example of this unhappy man be a warning to others.

How zealous he once was in the cause of free inquiry, will appear from an ingenious paper, called, *An Analysis upon Bonds*, written, as he observes in the preceding letter, while he was a student, and afterwards published by him in the *Westminster Magazine*. Under the head *Academy* is the following paragraph:

‘ Full belief before admission of every article of divinity, and every conundrum of a Dutch *Medulla* (it should be *ossa*; for they are *dry*, and *very dry*) THEOLOGIÆ—“ In *verba magistri jurare*,” or be expelled for an obstinate heretic.—To keep Turretine, or Ridgley, or Dr. Crisp, open upon the desk; but to huddle away Clark, and Foster, and Priestley into any dark corner, or to lock them up in an unsuspected box. Examination by a cloudy headed fool, or a quibbling sophist, or a barren costive brained systematic, or a wordy self-important pulpit comb.—Oh! ’tis enough!—and whoever thou art, poor soul! that art struggling with the manacles of academic tyranny,

‘tyranny, I feel for thy distresses, and would lend a helping
‘hand to ease thee of thy bonds. But time itself will do
‘it for thee, if thou canst venture to follow the poet’s ad-
‘vice——*Sapere aude.*’

In what light he at one time considered *conformity to the church of England*, may be seen in the following ingenious *Parody upon Shakspear*, entitled, *The Presbyterian Parson’s Soliloquy*, published some time ago in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*.

‘Conform, or not conform? That is the question.
‘Whether ’tis nobler in the mind to suffer
‘The stings and arrows of outrageous bigots,
‘Or to take refuge, ’midst a sea of curses,
‘And by *subscribing* end them. To preach in form canonical;
‘No more—and by a gown to say we end
‘The heart ach, and the thousand scoffs, or wants,
‘The poor cloak’d teacher’s heir to—’Tis a consummation
‘Devoutly to be wished. To preach—to speak in church;
‘To speak in church? Perchance to weep at home.

‘Aye, there’s the rub——

‘For by conforming thus what tears may fall,
‘When we have shuffled off the coil of conscience,
‘Must give us pause. There’s the respect
‘That makes the meeting-house of so long-standing.
‘For who would bear the scorns of upstart priests,
‘Our people’s frowns, complaints, and short subscriptions,
‘The pangs of thankless labours paid by yawning,
‘Their insolence to catechise our faith, and all the spurns
‘That patient preachers from th’ unworthy take;
‘When he himself might his *quietus* find
‘Upon a *benefice*? Who would bear neglect,
‘Or groan in want, whilst some men sweat with feasting;
‘But that the dread of something worse than hunger,
‘(That sting of conscience, whose malignity
‘No benefice can sooth) puzzles the will,

- ' And makes us rather bear these ills we have,
- ' Than fly to church by flying from our peace.
- ' Thus conscience keeps us Presbyterians still ;
- ' And thus the native hue of resolution is still kept up
- ' By every serious thought; and preachers too
- ' Who soon might be promoted, by this regard
- ' From bishops turn away, and lose the name
- ' Of *clergy*.

LETTERS

L E T T E R S
TO
THE REV. EDWARD BURN,
OF ST. MARY'S CHAPEL, BIRMINGHAM,

IN
ANSWER TO *HIS*,
ON THE
INFALLIBILITY OF THE APOSTOLIC TESTIMONY,
CONCERNING THE
P E R S O N O F C H R I S T .

*By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report; as deceivers,
and yet true.* 2 Cor. vi. 8.

*Blame not before thou hast examined the truth. Understand first, and
then rebuke.* Ecclesiasticus xi. 17.

THE
P R E F A C E.

I AM sensible that to many of my readers an *apology* for this publication will be necessary. There is, I freely own, something peculiarly irksome, and unpleasant, in a public controversy with a person residing in the same place with one's self, and especially one with whom we have some degree of acquaintance, and whom we are in the habit of occasionally meeting. On this account I was sorry to hear of Mr. Burn's publishing any thing against me; and though he was so obliging as to send me a copy of his *Letters*, I forbore to peruse them, till I was informed that they were much read, and made an impression unfavourable to the principles which I have maintained*. Publications ascribed to two other clergymen of this town, the profits of the latter of which were to go to the General Infirmary (though I do not suppose that it has been *this* that has encouraged the trustees to undertake the new wings of their buildings) being aware of my natural infirmity, which is a too great promptness to write, I never read at all; because, if I have any controversy (except it be of a perfectly amicable nature) I prefer having it with persons at a distance, and with whom I have no particular connection. But Mr. Burn has thought otherwise, and he has been the aggressor.

That there is nothing in myself so particularly hostile to the *established clergy*, as is generally imagined, may appear from some circumstances of my life, which (as, in a *Preface*, writers claim the privilege of speaking concerning themselves) I shall mention.

* Since the writing of this Preface there has been a second edition of Mr. Burn's *Letters*.

I had my grammar learning under a clergyman at a large public school, and though he lived to see me write against the principles of the church, to which he himself was thoroughly attached, he retained a friendship for me, as I did for him, as long as he lived.

At Needham Market in Suffolk, where I was first settled, the most intimate friend that I had was the rector of Stow-Market,† three miles from me. We had, as it were, but one heart, and differed in nothing but opinion.

At Namptwich, my next settlement, the vicar of Acton, at the distance of one mile, had a room in his house which he called *mine*, and which I always made use of whenever it was convenient to me to spend an evening, and sleep, from home, which I never did except with him. He said that he had never known a Dissenter before me. But a common love of science brought us acquainted, and I have now in my possession a telescope, made with his own hands, which he gave me as a token of his friendship.

At Leeds I need not say how happy I was in the society of Mr. Michell, so well known as the inventor of artificial magnets, and for his distinguished merit as a philosopher in general. My *History of Discoveries concerning of Vision, Light and Colours*, sufficiently shews my intercourse with him, and the obligations I was under to him.

When I was with the Marquis of Lansdown, Dr. Frampton, in that neighbourhood, whose principles in church and state were the *highest*, as they are called, of any man's that I ever met with, who even retained a strong predilection for the family of the Stuarts, and who retained it to his death, for some time kept aloof from me. But a common love of literature at length brought us intimately acquainted; and at last, when his troubles came upon him, I was perhaps the only person who had his intire confidence, and

and whom he considered as his most sincere friend. With some failings, he was a most extraordinary man, and I am not sorry to have this opportunity of mentioning him. In conversation, and preaching *extempore* (which he usually did without preparation, from the lesson of the day) his talents were, indeed, wonderful. I took great pleasure in hearing him, but more especially on particular occasions, when he excelled every man that I have yet heard. He then composed long discourses, and sometimes read them to me before they were delivered; saying (which I doubt not was literally true) that after reading them once with care he could deliver the whole *verbatim*, without notes, making only such alterations as occurred to him at the time of delivery. The last time that I heard him was at the consecration of a church by the late bishop of London, who had a great friendship for him. After the service (at which I was much more pleased than I expected to have been) he introduced me to his lordship, and we dined and spent the day very agreeably together.

In London, where at this time I spent my winters, I was happy in the friendship and society of some of the most distinguished clergymen that this country can boast.

If liberality of sentiment be the result of general and various acquaintance, few men now living have had a better opportunity of acquiring it than myself. This has arisen from the great variety of my pursuits, which has naturally brought me acquainted with persons of all principles, and characters. One day I remember I dined in company with an eminent popish priest; the evening I spent with philosophers, determined unbelievers; the next morning I breakfasted, at his own request, with a most zealously orthodox clergyman, Mr. Toplady, and the rest of that day I spent with Dr. Jebb, Mr. Lindsey, and some others, men in all respects *after my own heart*. I have since enriched my acquaintance with that of some very intelligent Jews; and my
opponents,

opponents, who consider me already as half a Mahometan, will not suppose that I can have any objection to the society of persons of that religion.

These facts may shew that, notwithstanding my avowed hostility to what is called *the church*, I have no particular enmity to the established *clergy*, and that I am not disposed to molest them, if they do not molest me; nor, while controversy is conducted in a fair and open manner, will this circumstance make any unpleasant difference between me and any man. I am at this day in habits of great intimacy with several of my opponents, and I have no objection to meet any of them, numerous as they are, if they have no objection to meet me. Mr. Burn would not have entertained so frightful an opinion of me as he expresses, if we had been better acquainted.

One reason for this publication is to shew those who will hear *reason*, what strange misconceptions have been taken up by well meaning people (for such I take Mr. Burn to be) who are governed by prejudice, and who, through that influence, will not take proper pains to inform themselves of the truth of what they hear generally propagated, concerning those whose religious principles they disapprove. What he advances in these Letters, void of all foundation as it is, is such declamation as I am informed is continually sounded from the pulpits of the churches, and other places of worship, in this town, and indeed in many other parts of England, as well as by the preachers in the streets (to whom, however, I am a sincere well-wisher) representing me as the declared enemy of *revelation*, and a setter up of *reason* in its place.

Indeed, I think myself pretty well off when I am not exhibited as an absolute *Atheist*, as I have been in several publications, particularly a very late one, intitled *Theodosius*, the writer of which represents Mr. Silas Deane, as declaring upon his death bed, that he derived his atheistical principles, and

and his ruin, from me, that I have called Jesus Christ a bastard, and his mother a whore; and that the Marquis of Lansdown seriously remonstrated with me on the subject; ascribing an habitual gloomy turn of mind whenever I am not in company, which he is pleased to give me, to those secret misgivings and apprehensions of sinking into annihilation to which Atheists are liable. Others have asserted that I have publicly declared that, "I would never rest 'till I had pulled down that impostor Jesus Christ;" and a preacher at Bristol, in the hearing of a friend of mine, said in his sermon, that "I had said I would be damned 'rather than be saved by Christ."

But can I wonder at this from strangers, when Mr. Burn, who living in the same town with me, has had a much better opportunity of knowing my real sentiments, as well as my general conduct, appears to be no better informed on the subject; having been seized with such an unaccountable alarm himself, and propagating that alarm among others, about the dangerous tendency of my principles; unmindful of the excellent maxim of my motto from Eccles. xi. 7. *Blame not before thou hast examined the truth, understand first, and then rebuke?*

If I could be surprized at any thing in this business (but I have seen so much of the blindness of bigotry, that I am surprized at nothing which originates from it) it would be at my being represented as *undervaluing the scriptures*, which is the burden of the song of Mr. Burn; when it is evident that few men, if any, have given more attention to them than myself. And what must be his own opinion of the scriptures, who can suppose that the consequence of an acquaintance with them is the contempt of them?

I was brought acquainted with them, I may say, from a child, and read the Old Testament in Hebrew earlier than any person I have yet met with. To say nothing of what I have written in support of the evidence of revelation (which

(which supposes the authority of the scriptures) in my *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, *Letters to the Jews*, my *Church History*, and several other works; as a minister, besides preaching, in which the doctrines and maxims of the scriptures are illustrated or enforced, I always largely expound a considerable portion of them, and I intend in due time to publish those expositions. The sole object of one of the three classes into which I distribute the younger part of my congregation, and which I attend to every Sunday, is the knowledge of the scriptures, and for this purpose I have compiled two *scripture catechisms*.

Many of my theological publications are employed in the illustration of scripture. It is pretty well known that the Notes to a late edition of the Bible, especially those that were taken from the collation of Hebrew manuscripts, and the late versions, were collected by me, and that I undertook it from the mere liking that I had to the work; and I am now engaged with some friends in a work of much more labour, which will shew in a still stronger light how much I value the scriptures, and how desirous I am that they should be understood and valued by others. Before Mr. Burn had charged me with want of due respect for the scriptures, he should at least have done as much to shew his own.

In this respect my case is singularly hard. The greater part of my philosophical acquaintance ridicule my attachment to christianity*, and yet the generality of christians will not allow me to belong to them at all.

* When I was at Paris, after a very free and serious conversation on the subject of *religion*, I was told by one of the company that I was the only person they had ever met with, of whose understanding they had any opinion, who pretended to believe christianity. When I asked what there was in christianity that appeared to them so very absurd, as to make it altogether incredible, they immediately mentioned *the doctrine of the trinity*. An enemy as I am considered to christianity by some, I have saved many from that *infidelity* into which the bigots are forcing them. While I am writing this Preface I receive a letter from a man whose abilities are universally acknowledged to be of the first rate, with whom

I had

Having been long used to this kind of misrepresentation and abuse, from persons who have had no very bad meaning, I am very ready to make allowance for those prejudices by which they have been first misled themselves, and then mislead others, and it does not affect me at all. But for the sake of some who are not absolutely *deaf* and *blind*, but that they can *hear* and *see* what is plainly brought before them, I thus endeavour to rectify their mistakes, which hurt *themselves* only, and not *me*.

But my chief motive for writing these Letters in reply to Mr. Burn, is to draw the attention of our readers to the important subjects to which they relate; nothing being wanted but this *attention*, and *free discussion*, continued a sufficient length of time, to give a firm establishment to whatever is *truth*. As I only wish for a candid hearing, I shall think I have not written in vain, if by means of these *Letters* any persons shall be induced to look into my other publications on the subject.

On this account I rejoice to see the warmth with which the cause of orthodoxy (that is of long established opinions, however erroneous) and that of the hierarchy is now taken up by its friends. Because if their system be not well founded, they are only accelerating its destruction. In fact, they are assisting me in the proper disposal of those grains of gunpowder, which have

I had no previous correspondence, who says, "I am indebted to you for the little I know of rational defensible christianity. But for your friendly aid I fear I should have gone from *enthusiasm* to *deism*; but a faith founded upon evidence rests on a rock."

As a contrast to the conduct of many bigots in this country, I shall farther observe, that when I was abroad, a very sincere catholic priest, hearing that on all occasions I avowed my belief of christianity, embraced me with tears literally running down his cheeks, saying, that all who were called *philosophers* that he had met with before were *atheists*. I told him that, though I was a christian, I was what he would call a *great heretic*. He replied, speaking English, "No matter, you are a christian." At home, where I ought to be better known, I am considered as one who is assiduously undermining christianity.

been

been some time accumulating, and at which they have taken so great an alarm, and which will certainly blow it up at length; and perhaps as suddenly, as unexpectedly, and as completely, as the overthrow of the late arbitrary government of France. If an inhabitant will not submit to a thorough examination, and reasonable repairs, of the building he occupies, the consequence must be that, without gunpowder, or even a high wind, it must some time or other fall, and happy may he think himself if he can escape unhurt from the ruins. If this should be the case with the church of England, the clergy cannot say that they have had no warning. They are labouring for its destruction much more than I am. If I be laying gunpowder, they are providing the match, and their part of the business seems to be in greater forwardness than mine.*

For the reasons abovementioned, I seriously rejoice at the violent opposition that is now so unexpectedly, and so unreasonably, made by almost the whole body of the clergy, and the high church party throughout the kingdom, to the repeal of the *Corporation and Test Acts* (Acts singularly disgraceful to this country, especially as pretending to liberality, since no such thing exists no where but in this, and which, I am confident, do no service at all to the established church) and especially in the numerous publications to which the discussion is continually giving rise. By these means the minds of men will in time be enlightened, not only on *this*, but on other more important subjects connected with it, concerning which Dissenters, as well as their opponents, have hitherto been much in the dark. They will now be in the way of being much better instructed in the sacred *rights of men*, and of *nations*, and especially in the nature of the connection that has hitherto strangely subsisted between the *church* and the *state*, a connection than which

* The parts of this Preface printed in *Italics* are those that were extracted from it, printed separately, and sent to all the bishops, and all the members of the house of Commons, just before the late debate on the motion for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.

nothing can be more unnatural, the one being a *kingdom of this world*, and the other *not*; so that it was necessary for the latter totally to change its *nature*, and guard itself by civil pains and penalties, in order to become capable of the *alliance*. These discussions will, I trust, prepare us for far greater improvements than any that we yet have in contemplation.

Such is the blind zeal which at present actuates a great part of the nation against the Dissenters, that I am verily persuaded that, were any law existing by which they were excluded from the peerage, from seats in the house of Commons, or from voting at elections for members of parliament, they would not be repealed. The measure would be said to be inconsistent with *the safety of the church*, to which every thing, how valuable soever, must be sacrificed. The *Act of Toleration* would hardly pass now, and still less would the *liberty of the press* be permitted, if it was not enjoyed. This would certainly be thought to be infinitely dangerous, both to church and state. Indeed, it is a thing at which any thing *unsound* in church or state has reason to tremble. Now, what we have good reason to think would not be *given*, we have some reason to fear may be *taken away*.

The spirit that has now gone forth may perhaps carry into execution those penal statutes, which we had flattered ourselves had been for ever *dormant*; and yet in this situation we are continually insulted with being told, that we actually enjoy a *complete toleration* for the profession of our religion; whereas it is evidently nothing more than a very precarious *connivance*.

The dreadful penalties of the Test Act have been threatened to be exacted at Nottingham, a place famous for the erection of the standard of Charles I. at the commencement of what has been called *the grand rebellion*. By this

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Act,

Act, for the discharge of a civil office, for which their townsmen thought them qualified, the late magistrates of that place might, besides paying the sum of five hundred pounds each, be hereafter disabled from suing or prosecuting in any court of law, being guardians of any child, being executors or administrators of any person, or being capable of any legacy or deed of gift*. To this dreadful penalty (a punishment proper for only the greatest crimes) is almost every dissenting minister now subject, only for collecting the tax that is to be paid at the birth of a child; which, however, they are obliged to do, under the penalty of twenty pounds. It will be said that this was an *oversight*, and was not *intended* to affect them. But neither was the Test Act itself originally intended to affect Dissenters. At present the question is not whether a thing be *right* or *wrong*, *reasonable* or *unreasonable*. It is sufficient that it will mortify the Dissenters. To this blind rage, both the honour and the best interests of the country must be sacrificed. *What a contrast is now exhibited between the two rival nations of France and England, and how may Englishmen blush to look upon it.*

The general infatuation on this subject is so great, as to call to our minds similar infatuations which, in the course of divine providence, have frequently preceded the greatest

* It has always been my opinion that Dissenters should not accept of any civil offices for which the majority of their countrymen have pronounced them disqualified, but patiently acquiesce in their exclusion from them till it shall please God, in the course of his providence, and by means of our peaceable representations and remonstrances, to open the eyes, and enlarge the minds, of our countrymen, and thereby give them more just ideas of the natural rights of men, and the true interest of their country. If the Dissenters would listen to me, they would from this time every where desist from exercising any civil offices to the discharge of which they were not compelled by law. That this is no new sentiment of mine, is well known to many. The true christian maxim is patiently to bear every kind of *persecution* till it shall please God to put an end to it; and to expect our reward not in this world, but at the *resurrection of the just*. But in proportion as a christian will be patient in suffering, he will be bold to speak, and to write, risking every thing in the *cause of God and of truth*.

and

and most unexpected revolutions in states. Of this nature was that which affected the *zealots*, as they were called, among the Jews, who fancied themselves actuated by nothing but the purest zeal for the laws of Moses, and the honour of their nation and religion. But it was a zeal which brought on with astonishing rapidity the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, an event which they deemed to be absolutely impossible.

Could any of the numerous pamphlets written by the friends of the court, many of them very sensible men, before the commencement of the American war, be now found, we should see that the reasons urged for the *coercion of America* (which was then the favourite phrase) on the principle that *we paid taxes and the Americans not* (and which was maintained to be a measure equally *just* and *expedient*) were so weak as to favour of this infatuation. And the consequences of this strange delusion, which began with the court, infected the clergy, and was propagated through the nation, occasioned the total loss of America, an event which was deemed to be impossible, and indeed which nothing but such an infatuation could have brought about.

But what is more wonderful still, is that, excepting the great addition to the *national debt* (which, if the separation of the countries had taken place *amicably*, might have been saved) we find ourselves not the worse, but the better for the event, which both friends and enemies imagined would be our ruin. Let us hope then that, though the present infatuation about the Corporation and Test Acts, and the violent zeal for the established church, should issue in the loss of that church, which the clergy would persuade us is necessary to the support of the state, this same *state*, which existed long before this church was known, may, contrary to their predictions, find itself not the weaker, but the stronger, the lighter, and in all respects the better for it; that after this dreaded event, there will be, what I can easily conceive,

even more *useful religion* in the country than there is now, and this supported at much less expence, and with far less reluctance.

How do we Dissenters support our religion? and are not the morals of our people, which is the end of all religion, especially as it respects the *state*, as good as those of the establishment? and should not we do this with more ease, if we were not burdened with the support of our share of the established religion besides. The fairest thing would certainly be for all the members of the state to *bear their own burdens*, without laying them on the shoulders of others.

Religion costs the American States nothing at all, and yet they have more of it than we have; whereas for the same commodity, and of an inferior quality, we pay a most enormous sum, collected in the worst manner, and besides this give something else that cannot be estimated by money.

Let the clergy be only more strict, and perhaps but a *little* more strict, than many of them now are in the exaction of their *tithes*, and the whole business of tithes may soon be over. The greatest enemies to the church are by no means the Dissenters. Nor is this the only way in which the clergy have been working their own destruction. *Another foolish and unjust war, like that with America, which was chiefly urged by the clergy (and such another, if the court proposes, the clergy will certainly second) can hardly fail to bring their affairs to a crisis**. If they be wise, they will consider the signs of the times, and be very temperate in all their proceedings. *Fas est et ab hoste doceri.*

* When I was attending a debate in the house of Lords in the course of the American war, and one of the bishops was taking the part of the minister in it, the Duke of Richmond suddenly rose, and bade the bishops beware of war. "War," said he, "is attended with expence; and if we be distressed, and must have money, we know where we may get it." Indeed, the addition of one hundred and fifty millions to the national debt, occasioned by that war (which may be called a war of the court and

Let them take care lest, by too vigorously resisting our application for what was never intended to hurt them, and what in itself cannot possibly hurt them, they should, by their own violence do themselves the most serious evil. I have always been an avowed enemy of all civil establishments of christianity, but many Dissenters are not so. I foresee, however, that they soon will be, and that by means of these discussions, the sentiment will become more general in the nation at large. It begins to be adopted even by the catholics. See Mr. Berington's admirable Tract intitled, the Rights of Dissenters.

The utility of ecclesiastical establishments is a question that it behoves the clergy always to keep out of sight as much as possible. But their rage against the Dissenters will obtrude it on the public, and in consequence of this, if they proceed as they have begun, I should be sorry to insure their system twenty years longer. Whether I be more pleased, or displeased, with their present violence, let them now judge. The greater their violence, the greater our confidence of final success. Because it will excite more public discussion, which is all that is necessary for our purpose.

I have been insensibly led much farther than I intended when I began this Preface, but the circumstances of the times must be my apology. If any person whose eye it may catch, take an useful hint from it, it will be well; but an old and true proverb says, Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn at no other. Nations, and all great bodies of men, are generally in this situation. They will learn very little except in this dear school.

and of the clergy) I consider as a great step towards the destruction of the hierarchy. How powerful an instrument of reformation a heavy national debt may be, we see in the late glorious revolution in France. May all great evils produce as great a good.

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L E T T E R S
TO
THE REV. EDWARD BURN.

LETTER I.

*On the Principle of Mr. Burn's Objection to my Reasoning
concerning the Person of Christ.*

REVEREND SIR,

HAVING had many *Letters*, and treatises in almost every form, addressed to me on the subject of my religious opinions, and knowing your zeal for what is usually called *orthodoxy*, I was not surprized to see an advertisement of *Letters* of yours to me, though I could not imagine why they should be on the *Infallibility of the Apostolic Testimony concerning the Person of Christ*, because it was an authority which I had never called in question.

I always took it for granted that the apostles, and all the early disciples of Christ, knew very well what kind of being their master was; and in all my writings on the subject my only object has been to ascertain, by their own writings in the first place, and other *media* of proof in the second, what was their opinion. This, I should have thought, must have abundantly appeared from the whole strain of my controversial works, which are written in a manner not very liable to be understood. For, having nothing to conceal, and being indifferent to all consequences, in the simple pursuit of truth, I always write with great frankness, and consequently with sufficient perspicuity.

Looking

Looking farther into your Letters, I was surprized to find that, without producing any evidence whatever from my own writings, you content yourself with taking it for granted that, in the question concerning *the person of Christ*, I intirely undervalue, and endeavour to invalidate, the *authority of the scriptures*, as knowing, or suspecting, it to be against me, and having recourse to I know not what other *shifts*, as you call them, p. 28. (which of course implies *disingenuity*, and a design to impose upon my readers) to gain my purpose. All this is so contrary to *fact*, and every appearance of *fact*, that, verfed as I am in controversy, I own myself for the first time, at a loss how to reply to such gross and unfounded calumny.

All the passages you quote are from the *Theological Repository**, in which I have maintained that some texts in the Old Testament have been improperly quoted by writers in the New. But this is not the question between us, but whether they were misled in their ideas concerning *the person of Christ*, so as to mislead others, by such mis-quotations. It does not follow that because I suppose the apostles to have been fallible in *some* things, that they were therefore fallible in *all*.

You must certainly, Sir, have written for the use of those only (and they are very many) who will never look into any of my writings, to see whether your representations be fair or not. And, indeed, it is hardly possible for plain men, accustomed to hear, and to speak truth, to suspect that such charges as those in your Letters could be advanced without some foundation, especially as Letters published and indiscriminately sold, must be open to *my* inspection as well as that of the world at large, so that your unfair conduct would be liable to be exposed.

* Mr. Burn only infers from the *congruity of sentiment*, and other circumstances, that the pieces he quotes in this work are mine. But this, in point of *etiquette* (observed, I believe, by all writers) will not justify his quoting them as *mine*. However, had he read the last number of the last volume of that work, he would have seen that I acknowledge those papers to be mine. I will add, that I do not yet see reason to retract any thing that I have advanced in them.

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Not imagining, as you might do with respect to *me*, that this charge of *mine* against *you* will be admitted without proof, I shall not follow your example, in representing your sentiments in *my words* only, as in the above general statement, but shall give *your own*. And, indeed, I read the passages several times before I could satisfy myself that any man, and especially a christian, and a christian minister, could advance such unfounded charges against a fellow christian.

“With the generality of Protestants,” you say p. 9. “I consider this testimony,” [viz. that of the apostles concerning the person of Christ] “as infallible. You have taken considerable pains to establish the contrary doctrine. —It is on this ground professedly that the argument from the comparison of scripture with itself, in proof of Christ’s divinity, has by you been rejected, as utterly impertinent and inconclusive.”

Taking it then for granted, that I consider the apostles as incompetent witnesses in the case, you say, p. 15, “If the testimony which the Spirit bore to Christ—left the apostles still under the dominion of prejudice and mistake concerning the person of the Messiah, common sense will oblige us to consider their qualifications as essentially deficient.” Then you add (with what you would think to be some *humour*) “It will be difficult to conceive how such conduct in the apostles could consist with the promise of their master, unless we suppose that *leading others into error*, and in a point too which formed no inconsiderable part of their mission*, may be admitted as the evidence that they themselves were *guided into all truth*.”

* Mr. Burn considers the doctrine concerning *the person of Christ* to be one of the objects of the apostolic mission; but it will not be easy for him to prove this. Nothing of this is said in our Saviour’s own instructions, or commission, which only require them to *preach the gospel to every creature*. That this is implied in the term *gospel* must be an arbitrary supposition, and certainly a thing of which the apostles could have no idea at the time of our Saviour’s speaking to them. At that time, Mr. Burn himself must surely allow, that they considered him as *being a man*, though a prophet. He always lived and conversed with them as such; and since, in the whole history

You also give the following general view of my conduct in this controversy, the whole of it, however, taken from your own imagination; neither producing, nor, I will venture to say, being able to produce, any evidence whatever for any one of the assertions in it, some of which are indeed sufficiently contradictory to others.

“ Let any man of candour attend to the manner, in which you would dispose of the argument from scripture in proof of the trinity: let him examine with care your very ingenious attempt to bring this only *decisive* mode of proof into discredit by diverting the attention of christians to *early opinions* and *general considerations*, mediums of proof which in the determination of this controversy are little better than learned impertinences; let him contemplate you, now *deposing* Christ and his apostles from the seat of *infallible authority*; anon, *exalting* them on the shoulders of Ebion, and other his worthy contemporaries, as *teachers sent from God*. Let him behold even Dr. Priestley floundering in the toils of popish sophistry; at one time invalidating the authority of scripture; at another, supporting that authority by the testimony of the church: and again, when expedient, bringing the authority of both into question! And what will be his inference from such conduct? Will he instantly conclude that a divine, who can have recourse to *shifts* like these is *serious*, when he talks of the scriptures as favourable to his opinions?”

It appears to me that every thing that you have here laid down as *facts*, concerning my sentiments and conduct in the controversy concerning the person of Christ, has arisen not from any attention that you have given to my real conduct in it, because it has been the very reverse of what you

history of the Acts of the apostles, nothing is said about his *nature*, it is evident that they had gained no new ideas on the subject. Peter, after the descent of the Spirit, when Mr. Burn supposes his mind to be most fully illuminated, contents himself with calling Jesus a *man approved of God by signs and wonders which God did by him*, which is certainly descriptive of nothing higher than a *prophet*.

describe

describe, but from your taking it for granted, that the doctrine of *the divinity of Christ* is so plainly taught in the scriptures, that all but *fools or knaves*, must see and acknowledge it, "If" you say, p. 28, "the infallibility of this testimony can once be established, nothing farther seems to be requisite to determine its sense in favour of orthodoxy, than a common understanding accompanied by christian simplicity."

It follows, therefore, that, as I do not acknowledge this *orthodox doctrine*, as you call it, I must be destitute either of *common understanding*, or of *christian simplicity*; and as you are pleased to allow me *the former*, you must of necessity deny me *the latter*. Not being possessed, then, of *christian simplicity*, I have recourse to what you call *shifts*, that is, I see the truth, and know it to be contained in the scriptures, but, from some principle, or some cause, which you call, p. 27, a *love of innovation**, I persist in denying it, and fighting against it, and against the scriptures too, because they contain it.

Now, Sir, let the person whom you have brought to the bar of the public be heard in his own defence, with respect to his treatment of the scriptures, and the use that he has made of them in the controversy concerning the person of Christ, that it may be seen whether it be *true in fact*, that I do reject the authority of the scriptures, as *impertinent* and

* To shew that I am actuated by a *love of innovation* (which, however, is an odd kind of principle, and leads to no certain end) Mr. Burn should shew that I am, or pretend to be, an innovator; whereas in all my theological opinions I am merely a follower of others. My ideas of *inspiration*, at which Mr. Burn takes the greatest alarm, are only those of Castalio, Le Clerc, and many others, the most intelligent and excellent of men, and among the best christians of the ages in which they lived. With respect to my opinion concerning the person of Christ, I certainly cannot be said to be any innovator; for thousands consider him as merely *a man inspired of God*, and many from the earliest times, as well as of late years, before I was a writer, or before I was born, have been of opinion, as I am, that he was the legitimate son of Joseph and Mary. How then does it appear that I have been so greatly misled by the *love of innovation*, when in fact I have innovated in nothing at all. I may as well charge Mr. Burn with the love of innovation. For his opinions are as peculiar to himself as mine are to me.

inconclusive,

inconclusive, and whether I have taken the pains you say I have done to prove this.

As what I may advance *at present* may be suspected to be produced by the force of your expostulations on the subject, I shall quote what I have said *before*, and in the course of this very controversy, which your Letters respect, and with which you ought to have been well acquainted. Now, you will find that you yourself cannot appeal to the scriptures with more confidence in proof of *your* opinion concerning the person of Christ, than I have always done in proof of *mine*; having ever considered the *testimony of the apostles* as being *infallible* in this case, as much as you can do. And the question between us at present is not which of us appeals to the scriptures with the greatest propriety and effect, but whether I appeal to them *at all*, or not, and whether I be willing to abide by their evidence. For you consider me as even *labouring* to invalidate it. Your conduct on this occasion is the more extraordinary, as it has been that of several of my other opponents, whose misapprehensions I have repeatedly corrected. But there seems to be no end of replying to the same calumny.

The author of the tract called *Primitive Candour* made the same objection to my conduct in the following words, "I would modestly and respectfully ask what can be the reason that Dr. Priestley should put the issue of this important controversy on the testimony of the Fathers, rather than on that of the inspired writers of the New Testament."

To this I replied as follows, 'If he will look into my other writings, he will find that I consider the great *stronghold* of the Unitarians to be *the scriptures*. It was the study of the scriptures that made me an Unitarian; and I have said it must be that which will make others so. I would take the liberty to refer him to my *Appeal to the Professors of Christianity*, the *Illustration of particular Texts*, the *General View of Arguments*, &c. and the *Introduction* to my large History, which I hope will soon be in his hands

‘ hands. However (if I may be indulged in a little allegory)
 ‘ thinking myself in full possession of this *strong hold* of my
 ‘ faith, I thought I could also seize upon a certain *out-work*,
 ‘ of some importance, in which the enemy had thought
 ‘ himself securely lodged. Accordingly I made a sally, and
 ‘ dislodged him. Attempts have been made to dispossess
 ‘ me of it, but hitherto they have been ineffectual. I am
 ‘ now strengthening the fortifications belonging to it; and
 ‘ here I am determined to stand a close and regular siege,
 ‘ conducted I hope by my present able opponent; and if I
 ‘ be compelled to surrender, I hope to acquit myself in such
 ‘ a manner, as to be entitled to leave it with all the honours
 ‘ of war. Still, however, I shall have my *strong-hold* to
 ‘ retire into.’

Surely,” says this writer, p. 8, “it must be acknow-
 ‘ ledged, that the divinity of Christ is a doctrine which the
 ‘ sacred scriptures *seem* to maintain; and Dr. Priestley
 ‘ himself will not wonder that a plain unlettered christian,
 ‘ who has borrowed but little light from philosophy, should
 ‘ imagine he reads it there.” ‘ So, I own the case *did* ap-
 ‘ pear to myself *formerly*. But as I read them *now*, the
 ‘ scriptures do not seem to teach any such doctrine, but, in
 ‘ the plainest of all language, such as the most unlettered
 ‘ christian must understand, they uniformly and emphati-
 ‘ cally teach the contrary doctrine, viz. that the Father is
 ‘ the only true God, and Christ the creature, the messenger,
 ‘ and the servant of that God.

‘ Without entering particularly into the argument at pre-
 ‘ sent, I appeal to the general tenor of the scriptures, in
 ‘ which *God* and *Christ* are constantly mentioned as beings,
 ‘ or persons, of a quite different *rank*, much more so than
 ‘ *man* and *beast*. They are never once confounded; and
 ‘ in no sense whatever, not even in the lowest of all, is
 ‘ Christ so much as called *God* in all the New Testament.
 ‘ I beg my candid antagonist only to read over the few fol-
 ‘ lowing plain passages, and let him say, if he does not find
 ‘ great difficulty in accommodating them to his system.
 ‘ And

‘ And these are only a few of what I might have produced,
 ‘ as containing, in the plainest words, the same great doctrine.

‘ Exod. xx. 3. *Thou shalt have no other God besides me.*
 ‘ Deut. vi. 4. *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord,*
 ‘ which is called (Mark xii. 29.) by our Saviour himself,
 ‘ *the first of all the commandments.* 1 Cor. viii. 6. *To us there*
 ‘ *is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we*
 ‘ *in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things,*
 ‘ *and we by him.* Eph. iv. 56, *One Lord, one faith, one*
 ‘ *baptism. One God, and Father of all, who is above all, and*
 ‘ *through all, and in you all.* 1 Tim. ii. 5. *For there is*
 ‘ *one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man*
 ‘ *Jesus Christ.*

‘ With respect to that one text, which this writer selects,
 ‘ as no doubt thinking it to be particularly favourable to his
 ‘ purpose, viz. 1 John v. 20. *And we are in him that is true,*
 ‘ *even in his son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and*
 ‘ *eternal life.* I take the liberty to refer him to my *Illus-*
 ‘ *tration of particular Texts of Scripture*, p. 31, where he
 ‘ may learn that by the phrases, viz. *him that is true*, and
 ‘ *the true God*, we are to understand God the Father only,
 ‘ the same whom our Saviour himself expressly styles *the*
 ‘ *only true God*, when, in his solemn prayer (John xvii. 3.)
 ‘ he said *that they might know thee the only true God, and*
 ‘ *Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* This alone should make
 ‘ us consider any interpretation of a passage which should
 ‘ make it say that there was *another true God*, as necessarily
 ‘ wrong, whatever other meaning should be put upon it.
 ‘ Supposing that in some part of the English Old Testament
 ‘ (in which the doctrine of the unity of God is so fully
 ‘ taught) it should be said that Moses was the true God;
 ‘ would any man, on that account, believe him to be so.
 ‘ He would immediately say that it must either be a wrong
 ‘ translation, that something else was intended besides what
 ‘ the words *seemed* to import, or that the passage was an
 ‘ interpolation.

If

‘ If we be influenced by what only *seems* to be contained in the scriptures, without using our reason in the interpretation of them, we may as well at once admit the doctrine of transubstantiation. For nothing can be more directly taught in the *words* of scripture. Does not our Saviour himself say (Matt. xxvi. 26.) *Take eat, this is my body*; and likewise, v. 27, *drink ye all of it, for this is my blood*? Did he not also say, in the synagogue of Capernaum, *Verily, verily I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood dwelleth in me and I in him*, with much more to the same purpose? There is no maxim of criticism clearer than this, viz. that no man of common understanding could mean to say either what was manifestly absurd, or what should be a flat contradiction to what he had expressly and repeatedly asserted. Now, nothing can be more absurd than the doctrine of *three divine persons* making only *one* God; nor can any writers more expressly contradict themselves, than by first teaching the doctrine of *one* God, calling that God *the Father*; and even *the God and Father of Christ*, and then saying that this Christ is himself God, equal to his own God and father. If I could make no sense at all of any particular passages, that might be found in any of the sacred writings, I should say, without scruple, that this could not be their sense.’

As your Letters, Sir, suppose that you have attended to the course of this controversy, you must, I presume, have read this passage. With what face, then, can you say that my appeal is not to *the scriptures*, and that I refuse to abide by their evidence?

In my reply to Dr. Purkis, who charged the Socinians in general, with a ‘ sceptical desire of explaining away the phraseology of scripture,’ I said, ‘ The plain language of scripture is much more in favour of Unitarianism than of the doctrine of the trinity, and it is with difficulty made to accord to the latter. The great doctrine of the strict
‘ unity

‘unity of God, and also that of the *pure humanity of Christ* is the common language of the scriptures, where no figure is used, or can be suspected. As when the apostle says (1 Tim. ii. 5.) *To us there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.* By what construction of words and phrases can the doctrine of the trinity be reconciled with this passage? Must not the literal meaning be explained away before it can be made consistent with this mysterious doctrine?

‘The texts which the Unitarians have to accommodate to their system are very few indeed, compared with those which the Trinitarians must subject to their mode of torture.’

Perhaps you will say that, these pieces being written in an early period of the controversy, you had overlooked them. But, surely, you must at least have read that part of the controversy, in which your great champion, the learned Bishop of St. David's, is concerned. He more than once made the same groundless objection that you now do, and I more than once replied to it; the second time reminding him of what I had observed before. Please, Sir, to peruse the following extracts from my Letters to him, when Archdeacon of St. Alban's.

‘But perhaps the most extraordinary part of your whole work will be thought to be the following. In answer to my saying that “many passages in scripture inculcate the doctrine of the divine unity in the clearest and strongest manner.” you say, p. 141. “Be pleased, Sir, to produce one of the many;” meaning evidently, that there is no such passage; and p. 17. you add, “the Unitarians themselves *pretend* not that their doctrine is to be found in the plain literal sense of holy writ. On the contrary, they take the greatest pains to explain away the literal meaning.”

‘Now, Sir, if you had really read any unitarian treatise at all, you must have known that this representation is the reverse of the fact. We Unitarians certainly *pretend* at least, whether we be able to prove it or not, that the general

‘tenor;

'tenor ; and plain literal sense of scripture is in our favour,
'that they are only *particular texts*, and those ill-understood,
'that you avail yourselves of ; and we say, that there is no
'difficulty in interpreting even those texts in perfect con-
'sistency with the unitarian doctrine, if the true idiom of
'the language be considered.

'You complain of my not *reading*, but only *looking*
'*through* authors. But surely, you cannot have even
'*looked through* the very *Letters* of mine that you are pro-
'fessedly replying to. Let me therefore, bring again before
'your view, a paragraph or two in those *Letters*, which, as
'far as *pretensions* go, directly contradict your confident
'assertion. See p. 90, where you will find as follows : " I
" will venture to say, that for one text in which you can
" pretend to find any thing harsh, or difficult to me, I will
" engage to produce ten that shall create more difficulty to
" you. How strangely must you torture the plainest lan-
" guage, and in which there is not a shadow of figure, to
" interpret to your purpose, 1 Tim. ii. 5. *There is one*
" *God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ*
" *Jesus.* 1 Cor. viii. 6. *To us there is but one God, the Fa-*
" *ther, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord*
" *Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him ; or*
" that expression of our Saviour himself, John xvii. 2. *That*
" *they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ*
" *whom thou hast sent.* Never upbraid us Unitarians with
" torturing the scriptures, while you have these, and a hun-
" dred other plain texts, to strain at, and to bend to your
" hypothesis ; besides many *general arguments*, from reason
" and the scriptures, of more real force than any particular
" texts, to answer."

'This, Sir, was certainly answering your challenge to
'produce *one plain text* in favour of the unitarian doctrine
'before it was thrown out. I appeal to yourself for the
'obvious sense of the passages I have now recited ; and you
'say, p. 23, " It is a principle with me, that the true sense
" of any phrase in the New Testament is what may be
" called

“ called its standing sense, that which will be the first to
 “ occur to common people, of every country, and in every
 “ age.”

“ I would also refer you to a small piece I lately published,
 “ entitled, *A general View of the Arguments for the Unity of*
 “ *God, and against the Divinity and Pre-existence of Christ,*
 “ *from Reason, from the Scriptures, and from History,* which
 “ you seem to have seen, as you refer to my *two-penny*
 “ *pamphlets*, for this is sold for two-pence. There you will
 “ find, not only that Socinians pretend to have the clear
 “ sense of scripture in their favour, but many of those passages
 “ expressive of that clear sense, produced. I there observe,
 “ p. 10, that “ the scriptures contain the clearest and the
 “ most express declarations, that there is but *one God*, with-
 “ out ever mentioning any exception in favour of a trinity,
 “ or guarding us against being led into any mistake by such
 “ general and unlimited expressions.” And if this language,
 “ as you suppose, always respected the multiplicity of gods
 “ among the heathens, why is this one God, in the New
 “ Testament always called the *Father*, and even *the God and*
 “ *Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*; and why are we no where
 “ told that this one God is the *trinity*, consisting of *Father,*
 “ *the Son, and the Holy Ghost*? This, Sir, is the language
 “ of your litany only. The Bible used in our conventicles,
 “ contains no such barbarous jargon.

“ I would also recommend to your perusal another pam-
 “ phlet of mine, called, *An Appeal to the serious and candid*
 “ *Professors of Christianity*, of which more than ten thousand
 “ have been sold for a penny each; and of this I have lately
 “ published a new edition, and have annexed to it the remark-
 “ able *Trial of Mr. Elwall*, of Wolverhampton, in this
 “ neighbourhood, for his publications in defence of the Soci-
 “ nian doctrine. These small publications of mine have, I
 “ trust, done much good, though you will call it much mis-
 “ chief, in this country. I rejoice in perceiving the increase
 “ of this good, or this mischief, every day; and I have no
 “ doubt of the successful spread of religious truth by means
 “ of

‘ of these publications, notwithstanding all you can do to
‘ counteract them.’

It may appear strange to quote so much from my own writings ; but is it not more strange that your conduct, Sir, should make this of mine *necessary* ? The quotations, however, abundantly prove that, whether I understand the scriptures or not, I am not afraid to *appeal* to them, and that I even make the great hinge of this controversy to turn upon them ; though you insist upon it that I *professedly reject* the argument from the scriptures, as *impertinent and inconclusive*.

After reading your Letters, I shall not wonder at your still persisting in saying, that I even *now* reject the authority of scripture. For I can say nothing stronger on the subject than I have repeatedly done before. This conduct of yours puts me in mind of the humorous attempt of Dean Swift to prove against Partridge himself, that he was dead ; and when the poor man replied, that if he was dead, he could not have answered him, the dean said that such an argument was to no purpose, as no man’s evidence could be admitted in favour of himself. So you, Sir, will perhaps allege that, though the question between us is simply whether I appeal to the scriptures or not, my own actual and repeated appealing to them is to be considered as no evidence at all. You will next, I suppose maintain that the publications are not *mine*. Indeed, there is no other method of supporting your accusation of me, and of vindicating yourself. However, you will not easily find any other person who will chuse to lay claim to them.

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

Of the Argument for the Divinity of Christ from Heb. i. 8.

REV. SIR,

HAVING confidently asserted, and severely censured, my utter rejection and contempt of scripture evidence, in the controversy concerning the person of Christ; you proceed to a particular instance, as an exemplification of my conduct in it. And as it happens that I have actually considered the very same text that you produce for this purpose, our readers will have an opportunity of comparing your representation of my treatment of this passage with my own actual treatment of it, in a treatise published long before your Letters were written, and probably long before you were of age to write at all; and the contrast will be not a little striking.

"I will endeavour," you say, p. 10, "to state this opinion by an example. Suppose the sixth verse of the forty-fifth psalm. Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." "Let this, in connexion with its parallel place in the first chapter of Hebrews, 8th verse, be the passage adduced in favour of Christ's divinity; according to your hypothesis there is no dependence to be placed on the argument, because the apostle, in his application of this scripture to the Messiah, *was misled by a prejudice common among the Jews, respecting this and other passages of the Old Testament.* In this statement, the principle at least of your objection, is faithfully preserved; a principle which I shall now proceed to prove, has for its object, not the emendation of an interpolated passage, nor the correction of such casual errors as are incident to every writer of antiquity, but the total demolition of revealed truth."

You

You then proceed to consider, and reply to, this treatment of the passage in question, taking it for granted, that it was *mine*, at least that *the principle*, as you say, *of my objection is faithfully preserved in it*. With what fidelity let our readers now judge for themselves.

In my *Illustration of particular Passages of Scripture*, first published in the year 1772, I consider this very text; and after perusing your Letters, the reader must be surprized to find that, instead of going upon the principle of the writer being *misted by any prejudice*, so that no dependence can be placed upon his argument, I actually explain it on the very opposite principle, viz. of its being a very proper citation; the passage quoted not being at all misunderstood by the apostle, and fully proving what he had in view, which was not the *divinity* of Christ, but his *dignity*, as conferred upon him by God; the character and authority of God, on which that of Christ rested, being properly mentioned on the occasion. What I then wrote, and which I still approve, is as follows, p. 34.

‘ Heb. i. 10. *And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, &c.* As there are several expressions in the first part of this chapter, which are not easy to be understood, I shall give a brief explanation of them all, in their order. The great objection which the Jews made to christianity being the meanness of Christ’s appearance, and the ignominious death that he suffered; to obviate this, the author of this epistle begins with representing the great dignity to which, for the suffering of death, Christ is now exalted at the right hand of God. Having said that, *God, in these last days, had spoken to us by his Son*, he immediately adds, ver. 2, *whom he hath appointed heir, or Lord, of all things; by whom also he made, or appointed, not the material worlds, but the ages; that is the present dispensation of God’s government over mankind, which is established by the gospel, the administration of which is committed to the Son. Who being the brightness of his (that is God’s) glory, and the express image*

‘ *image of his (that is God’s) person, and upholding all things by the word of his (that is God’s) power, &c. sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high.* It is plain from this passage, that whatever Christ is, he is by divine appointment, *whom he APPOINTED heir of all things.*

‘ Afterwards this writer proceeds to prove that Christ is superior to angels, and at the close of this argument, he has these words, *but concerning the son he says, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever ; or as it may be rendered, God is thy throne for ever and ever ; that is, God will establish the authority of Christ till time shall be no more. A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God, even thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.* From this passage nothing can be more plain, than that whatever authority belongs to Christ, he has a superior from whom he derives it ; *God, even thy God, has anointed thee.* This could never have been said of the one true God, whose being and power are underived.

‘ In verses 10, 11, 12, the apostle quotes an address to God, as the great Creator and everlasting Ruler of the universe, but without any hint of its being applied to Christ, from Psalm cii. 25, 27. *And thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed : but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.* This quotation was probably made with a view to express the great honour conferred on Christ, on account of the dignity of the person who conferred it. For it immediately follows, ver. 13, *But to which of the angels said he,* that is, the great Being to whom this description belongs, *Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy foot-stool.* Or, since this quotation from the Psalmist describes a perpetuity of empire in God, it may be intended to intimate a perpetuity of empire in Christ
‘ who

‘ who holds his authority from God, and who must hold it, unless God himself be unable to support it.’

This, Sir, I hope, will be a lesson to you in your future attempts at controversy, and teach you not to write from *imagination only*, but to have some *facts* to go upon. What would you think of a judge, or jury, who should treat a criminal as you have done me, that is, condemn him not only *without evidence*, but *contrary to evidence*, and that of the plainest kind?

I do not profess, any more than you do, in this correspondence, to enter into the controversy itself, but only to consider the *principle*, or *ground*, on which it proceeds. I cannot, however, avoid observing with respect to these quotations from the Psalms, by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews (which you, I doubt not, think so decisively in favour of the proper divinity of Christ, that I must renounce all scripture authority before I can evade the force of them) that if your interpretation be just, worse consequences will follow than any of those which you have ascribed to my principles, and which it behoves you and your friends to consider. It is, that if the person here described by the characters of *him who laid the foundation of the earth, the work of whose hands are the heavens, who will even change them with as much ease as a garment, and who is for ever unchangeably the same*, be descriptive of *Christ*, there is no such person as *God the Father* at all. For, certainly, the Being who is thus described by the Psalmist was the only God that he acknowledged, or that is acknowledged in all the Old Testament, and consequently in the New. For make what you will of the word *elohim*, there certainly is but one *Jehovah*. And thus that great Being, to whom Christ himself prayed, as *the only true God*, John xvii. 3. will not only be no God at all, but an absolute non-entity, and whose absence from the creation would not be missed. Blasphemous and dreadful consequences are frequently ascribed to *my* opinions; but what are they, Sir, in comparison of *this*? It is more than *dethroning*; it is no less than

annihilating, the Almighty Maker of all things, and setting up a mortal man (one who actually did die, and whom God raised from the dead) in his place.

There is another passage of scripture in the interpretation of which you exceedingly exult, viz. Ps. cx. 1. quoted by our Saviour as applicable to the Messiah, calling any interpretation that I can give of it, p. 19, "the very extreme of impiety, hostile to the authority of the New Testament, and utterly inconsistent with his character who was endued with the holy Spirit without measure." You hereupon request my explicit answer to our Lord's question, *If David then call him Lord, how is he his son.* "No doubt," you insultingly add, "your superior advantages of knowledge, in this as in all other respects, will effectually secure you from the *embarrassment*, and consequent *silence* of those to whom the question was originally propounded."

Now, Sir, I feel no *embarrassment* on the subject, and therefore no cause for the *silence* to which you imagine you have reduced me. The Pharisees considered their Messiah as another David, viz. a great *king* and *conqueror*; nor does it appear that they had any idea of his being a person superior to David in any respect. It might, therefore, well puzzle them to find that David should call him *Lord*; as I think it must not a little puzzle you to make out how a *God* could be *the Son of man*, or how it should be necessary that Jesus should have *the Spirit of God without measure*, to enable him to work miracles, if he had that power *in himself*, independent of this *Spirit*, or of that *God* whose Spirit it is. Meanly as, in your idea, we Unitarians think of Christ, we consider him as a person greatly superior to David, and very justly called *his Lord* and Master, as well as ours. When his proper kingdom takes place, he will be king over David himself. If you ask how came one man to be so greatly exalted above others, I ask how came David, who was only a *shepherd's boy*, to be made so great a *king*?

Whether

Whether Jesus considered the passage he quoted as originally relating to himself, or whether he only argued with the Pharisees, as he frequently did, on their own principles, does not appear. I feel no embarrassment in consequence of either supposition, though I consider the passage as relating to David, or Solomon, only. But this subject I have discussed elsewhere. What I have advanced is submitted to the judgment of the public, and I am willing that it should stand or fall by its own weight.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

Of the Reasons for appealing to Early Opinions concerning the Person of Christ.

REV. SIR,

YOUR account of the ground, or principle, of my enquiry into the *sentiments of the early Christians* concerning the person of Christ appears as strange to me, as your account of my treatment of *scripture authority* on the subject. That so very plain a business, and for which I have so frequently given the plainest reasons, could be so greatly misunderstood, and misrepresented, is, I think, not a little extraordinary. "It has as often," you say, p. 5, "as I have considered the subject, appeared to me in a high degree preposterous to advert to *early opinions* in proof of a doctrine, which, from its nature, can ultimately be determined by the scriptures only. Discussions of this nature," you say, p. 6, "can do little more than excite the sneer of infidelity, and are manifestly incongruous and absurd." Again, p. 28, you represent them
as

as "an ingenious attempt to bring the only decisive mode
 "of proof into discredit," and call my arguments "me-
 "diums of proof which in the determination of this con-
 "troverſy are little better than learned impertinences."

As it is evident that you have never *read*, or, which
 comes to the ſame thing, have never *conſidered*, what I have
 already advanced on this ſubject, I ſhall once more place
 before you two of the paſſages which ſufficiently explain the
 reaſons of my conduct. To the author of Primitive Can-
 dour I ſay, p. 98, 'I am not a little ſurprized that this
 'learned and ingenious writer ſhould need to be informed,
 'that, to aſcertain the opinion of the chriſtian world in the
 'age immediately following that of the apoſtles, cannot but
 'be of great uſe in order to aſcertain the opinion of the apoſ-
 'tles themſelves, and conſequently the true ſenſe of their
 'writings. There may be many cauſes which at this diſ-
 'tance of time may miſlead us in our interpretation of their
 'writings; but they muſt have been underſtood by thoſe
 'for whoſe uſe they were written, and who could have had
 'recourſe to the writers themſelves to explain their meaning,
 'if it had been doubtful.

'I have no doubt but that, if this writer himſelf could
 'clearly prove, from independent evidence, that the com-
 'mon people among the early chriſtians, both Jews and
 'Gentiles, were ſuch Trinitarians as he is, he would make
 'no ſmall account of the fact, as being nearly deciſive in
 'proof of the apoſtles having been Trinitarians, and that
 'the doctrine of the trinity is contained in their writings.
 'I think that I can prove that the chriſtians of the early
 'ages were Unitarians, and this is one reaſon, independent
 'of my own interpretation of their writings, why I con-
 'clude that the apoſtles were ſo.'

In my letter to Mr. Barnard, I ſay to the ſame purpoſe,
 p. 83, 'You think it extraordinary, p. 334, that I ſhould
 'have recourſe to ſuch guides as the fathers to ſettle my
 'opinion concerning the doctrine of the trinity, thinking,
 'I ſuppoſe, that the ſtudy of the *ſcriptures* might render all

'other

‘other helps unnecessary. Now I have more than once
‘given my reasons for this conduct. It is, in short, this,
‘Christians are not agreed in the interpretation of *scripture*
‘*language*; but as all men are agreed with respect to the
‘nature of *historical evidence*, I thought that we might per-
‘haps better determine by history what was the faith of
‘christians in early times, independently of any aid from
‘the scriptures. And it appeared to be no unnatural pre-
‘sumption that, whatever *that* should appear to be, such
‘was the doctrine of the apostles from whom their faith
‘was derived; and that by this means we should be pos-
‘sessed of a pretty good guide for discovering the true sense
‘of the scriptures.’

If, after reading these passages, you still have no clearer idea of the nature and object of my late disquisitions, concerning *the opinions of early times*, than you had when you wrote your Letters to me, I am not able to do any thing more for you, and my conduct must still remain as inexplicable as ever.

Your curious allusion, p. 28, to my *floundering in the toils of popish sophistry* in this inquiry shews, if you have any meaning at all, your total misapprehension of this business. For I have had little or nothing to do with any writers that are ever called *popish*; having quoted only those *christian fathers* with whom the doctrine of the trinity originated, and whose own account of it I have faithfully exhibited, that my readers might see from what principles this strange doctrine of *three persons in one God* (a doctrine as absurd in itself, and in every possible explanation of it, as it is abhorrent to the whole tenor of revelation) first rose, and how differently, and absurdly, it has, in all its stages, been explained. It was not therefore *my* floundering, but the floundering of the fathers of your own faith, and *your own* floundering, who have followed them, that has contributed to your amusement, as well as mine.

What you quote from Mr. Seed, in vindication of the conduct of those *learned individuals*, as you call them, p. 6,
who

who have thought it necessary to meet me on the ground of *history*, is notoriously false in point of fact. "The anti-trinitarians (says he) first introduced metaphysics into the question, on purpose to perplex it with laboured abstractions, and studied refinements; and then the *Catholics* were obliged, though reluctantly, to follow them through all their mazes and windings, to shew that the doctrine would abide the test of metaphysics. For if some men's understandings, like the earth *under the curse*, will be fruitful of little else but *thorns and briars* to entangle and perplex; it is a duty incumbent on the labourers in the vineyard to *weed* the soil, and not let the doctrine be *over-run and choaked* by them."

Now there is no instance of any Unitarian having had recourse to metaphysical reasoning till the platonizing fathers, the authors of the doctrine of the trinity, did so. It is this doctrine only, and not that of the Unitarians, that *requires* any metaphysics. Had all christians been content, as the Unitarians are, with considering the supreme *Father as the one true God*, and Jesus, like Moses and other prophets, as *a man sent of God*, no nice distinctions had been necessary. For *God* and *man* are very different beings. But when Christ was first represented as *an attribute of the Father personified*, and then as *God equal to the Father*, a distinct *divine person*, and yet *not another God*, then came in *metaphysics*, that is, the most subtle distinctions, or rather the most palpable nonsense on the one hand, in order to reconcile the most manifest contradictions, and accurate discussion on the other, to shew the insignificance of such distinctions.

I am, &c.

LETTER

LETTER IV.

Of the Doctrine of Inspiration.

REV. SIR,

THE subject of the *Inspiration of the Scriptures*, on which you enlarge so much, I have no occasion to discuss with you, because I allow the infallibility of the writers as far as the question between us is concerned. Besides, our difference on this head is not so great as you would give your readers to understand. For you allow, *Note*, p. 27, *inaccuracies*, of some kind or other, in their writings, and say that, "where there was no extraordinary occasion to interpose, God did not think fit to interpose in an extraordinary manner." We adopt, therefore, the same rule, and only differ in our application of it; you considering those as *extraordinary occasions*, which I see in a different light; and as you judge by your own reason, what those extraordinary occasions are, I do the same by mine, which is only setting up the reason of one man against that of another, and not against God, which you perpetually insinuate that I do.

You add, indeed, that besides this *plenary inspiration* where it was necessary, the authors were "so far superintended in writing as to secure them from all error." But this, Sir, is arbitrarily asserted, and more than your own *general maxim* requires. For had Paul, for example, forgotten himself, and left his cloak somewhere else than at *Troas*, you would hardly have thought that a proper occasion for a divine interposition, to rectify the mistake. Now there is no error that I ascribe to the apostles of any more consequence to the real object of their mission, than such a mistake as this.

As to the *person of Christ*, it was impossible, without any inspiration, for the Apostles to be under any mistake about it;

it; and what they thought of him, both before and after his resurrection, is evident from their language concerning him. Before that event they considered him (Luke xxiv. 19) as *a prophet mighty in word and deed, before God and all the people*; and after the descent of the holy spirit, when you suppose them to have been divinely illuminated, as *a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by him* (Acts ii. 22) *whom men had put to death, but whom God had raised from the dead*. These are all characters descriptive of *a prophet*, and what the Jews meant by that term is well known. Moses was a prophet, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, &c. were prophets, that is, men inspired by God, not themselves Gods. Such a prophet, therefore, no doubt, the apostles and early christians took Christ to be, when they gave him that name, and ascribed to him those characters.

Though I have no occasion, as I have observed, to discuss the subject of *inspiration* with you, I cannot forbear quoting some extraordinary paragraphs of yours relating to it, especially some of those in which you represent the *consequences* of my opinions, that our readers may judge for themselves how consistent they are with your declaring p. 23, that you “would *not* wantonly place my opinions “in an invidious point of light. Many of our readers, however, will probably think that the word *not* is here inserted by an error of the press, because the following paragraphs will do much better without it—“I would not “wantonly place your opinions in an invidious point of “light; but I would seriously ask, may not any man, consistently enough with your doctrine, set up a defence of “the worst opinions, and even excuse the most villainous “practice by only alleging, that the passages of scripture “which condemn, or prohibit his conduct are not of divine “authority? This consequence, Sir, however shocking “to common sense, and subversive of every sound principle “of morality, seems to my mind, the necessary result of “this dangerous opinion. For, let the stable basis of *infallible*

“ *fallible* inspiration be once destroyed, and it will inevitably follow, that the authority of the New Testament must revert to private judgment.

“ It is seriously incumbent (p. 25) upon Dr. Priestley, before he utterly renounces the authority of scripture, to produce some more efficacious and explicit ground of moral obligation. Your theory of inspiration appears (p. 26) to my understanding, big with every mischief. I tremble, (ibid) at the application of your principle! Under its auspices the *decatalogue* is not more secure than the *apostolic testimony*. For if the reason of the individual is to be the sole umpire in matters of *faith*, why not in the choice of *conduct* also? It is evident, Sir, from your own example, that there is no authority which this reason may not dispute, and it requires but little discernment to perceive, that when once the authority of the legislature is called in question (whether that authority be human or divine) an opportunity only is wanting to justify disobedience, It is in this view that your opinions are worse than ridiculous. P. 27.

“ The *licentiousness of opinion* (p. 27) generated by a love of *innovation* which disdains submission to every authority that may be suspected to interfere with the interests of Unitarianism, &c.*

* It is something extraordinary that Mr. Burn should ascribe so very much to a mere *desire of promoting Unitarianism*. For if I be the man that he describes, what can Unitarianism do for me, and therefore why should I be so much concerned for it, and especially make myself so obnoxious as I have on this account? In this situation certainly the most natural, as well as the most candid, supposition is, that I embrace Unitarianism, and endeavour to propagate it, because I consider it to be the cause of important *truth*, which it becomes every man to respect, and to promote. What other recommendation can it have for me, or any other man, in this country, according to the laws of which it is confiscation of goods and imprisonment for life to profess it? But we think we ought to *obey God rather than man*, at any risque. There must be some strange charm in Unitarianism, if, as Mr. Burn seems to suppose, independent of a love of truth, of a regard to interest, and of every other rational motive that can actuate the human mind, it should have this great power over men. Why should not Trinitarianism operate in the same manner?

Lastly,

Lastly, you more than insinuate that I am determined to oppose the authority of scripture, notwithstanding these horrid consequences, when you say, p. 17, "an inspiration, Sir, which leaves a man in ignorance, and qualifies him to blunder on those very points which it was the design of his mission to reveal, may be a desirable thing to those (if such men there be) who have systems to maintain in opposition to its authority."

On what you say of the *decalogue itself* not being safe with me, of my calling in question the *authority of the supreme legislature*, and my making *the reason of the individual the sole umpire in matters of faith*, which, you say, will *justify all disobedience* to the laws of God, I must remark with some severity but with justice.

The positions abovementioned are no applications of any principle of mine, though you are pleased to call them so. This whole string of assertions is nothing less than the grossest and most unfounded of *calumnies*, for which you have no authority at all, not even that of an *inference* from any thing that I have advanced; though *that* would be unfair to ascribe to me; since no man is properly answerable for any thing more than he himself allows.

Where, Sir, have I said that *the reason of the individual is the sole umpire in matters of faith*? I call upon you to produce any thing that I have written that will bear such a construction. You must absolutely have been reading Bolingbroke, Hume, or Voltaire, and have imagined their writings to be mine. I think I may say that no man now living in this country, nor perhaps in any other, has written more to prove the very reverse of what you ascribe to me, viz. *the insufficiency of human reason, and the necessity of divine revelation*.

The two truly great doctrines of revelation, are those of the *unity of God*, and the *resurrection* of man to a future life; neither of which, in my opinion, could the unassisted reason of man have discovered, and least of all the latter. But though you virtually deny one of these doctrines, by
maintaining

maintaining a trinity of divine persons, or Gods; and though you, in fact, supersede the other, by the doctrine of a soul, thereby rendering the resurrection of the body of no value at all, I do not charge you with denying revelation. Both these infringements of the great truths of revelation, I would farther observe, were made by human reason, or philosophy, as in my writings I have abundantly proved. They arose from the vain speculations of men, operating to undermine the great and distinguishing doctrines of revelation. It is you, Sir, therefore, and not me, who set up reason against revelation.

That your notions on the subject of inspiration and the authority of scripture, are extremely crude, and indigested, or else that you do not know how to express your own meaning, is evident from your supposing, p. 32, that the sense only, and not the authority of scripture, is to be determined by reason, and from your saying that otherwise "our faith, contrary to the scripture, will stand in the wisdom of man." But, pray, Sir, how do you actually judge of the authority of scripture, if you set aside the use of reason? You have two books, for example, presented to you, the Bible, and the Koran, and the authority of each is to be determined. If, instead of the use of reason, you have recourse to what you here oppose to it, viz. the infallibility of the apostolic testimony, how are you to ascertain this? You are not to take the mere word of the apostles, for their infallibility, any more than that of Mahomet for his. Certainly, then, you must have recourse to this so much dreaded and reprobated reason, if you make a wise decision at all. You will hardly say that God, or the apostles, have revealed themselves to you personally, and told you which of these two books is to be your infallible guide. Or if they have revealed themselves to you, they have not to me, and many others; and in a matter of this consequence we shall not take your word, or any man's word. We require the proof of your inspiration, and of the degree of it, and shall judge of the evidence you produce by our own reason only.

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When you next declaim in this random manner against the *use of reason*, remember the old saying, that "No man is against reason, till reason is against him." Notwithstanding I refuse to surrender my reason to you, or to any man, *the Bible*, rightly understood, is as much my religion, as it was that of Chillingworth, yourself, or any other Protestants, though you suppose, p. 29, that I renounce it.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

Of the immoral Consequences of my Opinions.

REV. SIR,

WITH respect to all the immoral consequences that you so liberally ascribe to *my* opinions, I shall content myself with saying, that if *your* principles be consistent with such manifestly unjust and injurious insinuations, by which nothing could be meant but to render my character odious (though with a view, as you may say, to the advancement of truth) I disclaim such principles, unknown and unexamined, and prefer the extreme of *heresy*, with candour, to the most perfect *orthodoxy* without it. As the Indian said to the Spanish priest, who would have persuaded him to be baptized in the article of death, threatening that if he did not submit to that ceremony, he would certainly go to hell, whither all his ancestors had gone before him, that "he chose to go to his ancestors, rather than to any place whither the Spaniards went;" so, Sir, judging of the *tree* by its *fruits*, I shall willingly take my chance with pious, virtuous, and candid Unitarians, with such men as Dr.

Lardner,

Lardner, Dr. Jebb, &c. who brought no railing accusations against any man (though sentenced by your church *without doubt to perish everlastingly*) rather than with those who scruple no misrepresentation, or abuse, to promote their cause, though in itself it should be ever so good. Fearing God, and respecting his *truth*, I hope I shall never fear what *man* may say of me, or do to me, least of all in another world, where, happily, your power does not extend.

Had you, Sir, been more attentive to our Saviour's excellent and plain rule in judging of men, viz. *By their fruits ye shall know them*, you would not have been subject to such dreadful alarms about the consequences of my opinions, or any others, as you now either are, or affect to be. You say that my sentiments are *big with every mischief*, that they *attack the very basis of moral obligation*, that they are *unfavourable to the interests of society*, that even *the decalogue itself is unsafe*, that *all principle being gone*, nothing but *opportunity* is wanting to justify disobedience. To alarm your readers, if possible, still more, you add, p. 27, "to those who consider the influence that, in the concurrence of events, favourable to *innovation*, such opinions may have on the *conduct*, it is a truly serious concern."

Had I taught principles professedly *atheistical* you could not have expressed greater apprehensions than these. For when all *moral principle* is destroyed, men are prepared for every villainy. With these ideas I should not wonder if you should advise the immediate apprehension of all Unitarians, lest you should not be able any longer to sleep in your beds, or travel the public roads in security, or lest your wives and daughters should be exposed to the most brutal outrages. For there is nothing that human nature is capable of, so atrocious that you do not think us actually ready to perpetrate.

But pray, Sir, have you considered what *time* it will require for such principles as ours to operate, and produce their proper effect? For if they have *any tendency* to produce mischief, it cannot lie dormant *for ever*. If, according

to our Saviour, *moral principles* may be compared to a tree, there must be a time for its *bearing fruit*. Now to say nothing of primitive times, these very principles have been publicly professed in many countries of Europe, at least, ever since the reformation. I myself have taught them more than thirty years. Many others are as indefatigable in the business as myself, and it is universally acknowledged, and pathetically lamented by many, that they gain ground every day; and pray, Sir, what do you actually *see*, to make you *tremble* in this manner? If our lives had not been as sober, and exemplary, as yours, indifferent spectators would have perceived it, and have taken the alarm as well as you; but if no apparent mischief has arisen from our principles in three hundred years, I should think you might dismiss your fears, and conclude that it was merely a *false alarm* that had agitated you so much.

Besides, I could wish to quiet your fears *on your own account*. For the many sleepless nights which your apprehensions, if real, must necessarily have caused you, accompanied, of course, with much earnest *prayer* and *fasting*, must in time affect your health. This constant *trembling*, *fasting*, *watching*, and *praying*, will soon wear any man, more corpulent than you are, to a skeleton; unless, with Falstaff, grief should have a contrary operation with you, and *blow you up a like a bladder*.

Consider then, I say again, for the sake of your own *peace of mind*, and *health of body*, what *time* you think our principles may require to operate, and whether that time may not be actually *elapsed*, so that you may make yourself easy about them. If they be *big*, as you say, with mischief (and especially with *every mischief*, crimes of every kind and degree, including *treason*, *murder*, *burglary*, &c.) they must some time *burst*; if they *attack the basis of moral obligation*, with any vigour, it must sooner or later *give way*: and if nothing but *opportunity* be wanting for the commencement of our outrages (all *moral principle* being totally gone) it must have occurred in a reasonable space of time. Indeed, such

such opportunities are presented every day, because crimes are committed every day. But are they committed by Unitarians, more than Trinitarians?

As to the *decalogue*, you certainly break one of the commandments, viz. the *first*, which, from that very circumstance, we may suppose, not to be of the least importance. It is that which solemnly enjoins the acknowledgment, and worship, of only *one God*. And the ninth, which requires you not to bear *false witness against your neighbour*, you have shamefully violated in this very publication. Now which of these commandments do you charge us Unitarians with habitually violating? I believe, however, that though you have broken these commandments, you have not had a very bad intention at the bottom; but you certainly *do not know what spirit you are of*.

That you may not hereafter *fear where no fear is*, please to take from me, a preacher of christianity as well as yourself, though not appointed according to your rules (which, it is said, *you did not wait for*) and one who has studied christianity at least longer than you have done, this plain lesson of it. That which is most favourable to virtue in christianity is the expectation of a future state of retribution, grounded on the firm belief of the historical facts recorded in the scriptures, especially the miracles, the death, and resurrection of Christ. The man who believes these things only (which I imagine I do as firmly as you) and who, together with this acknowledges an *universal providence*, ordering all events, who is persuaded that our very hearts are constantly open to the divine inspection, so that no iniquity, or purpose of it, can escape his observation, will not be a bad man, or a dangerous member of society. These principles, which are common to all christians, habitually impressed upon the mind, would lead us all to *set God always before us*; and thus constantly *living as seeing him who is invisible*, cherishing an habitual love and reverence for him, and having an immortal state hereafter in continual prospect, our hearts will be loosened from all improper attachments to this world,

all inordinate desires will be suppressed, all undue resentments stifled, and we shall rejoice in nothing so much as the pursuit of truth, and the uniform practice of virtue.

If your religious principles, Sir, can do more for you than this, shew it by your conduct. As yet, it does not appear from your *Letters*, that you have learned even so much. The reason of it is that there are *tares* mixed with your *wheat*; there is in your system of christianity something that debases the *pure spirit* of it, and does not consist with either the perfect veneration of the divine character, which is the foundation of true devotion to God, or with perfect candour and benevolence to man. I mean those *corruptions of christianity*, which your church retains, and which it is my great object to explode, from the full persuasion I have of their bad tendency, though I am far from considering them in so frightful a light as that in which you have represented *my* opinions.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

The Conclusion.

REV. SIR,

AS I have as much apprehension of your being *embarrassed*, and reduced to *silence* by what I have urged in these *Letters*, as you had from what you addressed to me; and as you seem to have wanted the advice of some judicious *friend* in the conduct of this business, and it is possible that, in lieu of it, that of an *adversary* may be of *some* use to you, I shall freely give you mine.

If you be disposed to reply in the same spirit and on the same principles, with which you wrote your *Letters*,
say

say boldly (for strong assertions, you must have found by the reception your Letters have met with, will have some weight) that, sinking under your charge of despising the scriptures, I was reduced to the necessity of *utterly renouncing*, as you plainly foretold, p. 25, that I should do, *the authority of scripture*; and that, *not being able to produce any more efficacious and explicit ground of moral obligation*, I first did as your predecessor Mr. Venn (to whose performance this of yours, Sir, bears a very striking resemblance) declared that *he* would do, if his opinion should be confuted, viz. that I formally *burned my Bible*, and that, then, agreeably to the maxims which he ascribes to all *new schemers*, I *went and hanged myself*; and this will give you a fine opportunity of exerting all your powers of pathos in warning other Unitarians, and the world in general, by my example. If you should even proceed to publish my *last dying speech and confession*, together with a commentary upon it, it will only be of a piece with the strange and groundless assertions in your Letters; and as few of your readers will question any thing that you think proper to publish, you may, before the truth be discovered, have the credit of having totally demolished me, of having happily rid the world of so pestilent and restless a heretic as I am, and may consequently rise in pre-ferment even above the haughty bishop of St. David's.

This, Sir, would be writing as you actually *have* written, that is, without the least regard to truth, or probability. But if you have any remains of christian principle within you, ask pardon of God, of the public, and of myself, for your gross and ill founded calumnies, and then, I shall be happy to shew my christianity by forgiving you. By such tests as these try me as much as you please.

To conclude with perfect seriousness, I call upon you, Sir, in the face of this town, and of your country, before whom you have published your accusations of me,

1. To produce if you can, (for as yet you have not even attempted to do it) any passage in my numerous writings from which it can, by any fair construction, be in-

ferred, that I reject *the apostolic testimony concerning the person of Christ*; which is the principal object of your Letters.

2. Make it appear by something else than your own confident *assertions*, that my object in inquiring into *early opinions concerning the person of Christ* was an *injurious attempt*, as you scruple not to call it, *to bring the only decisive mode of proof into discredit*. And

3. Shew where I have, in the most distant manner, insinuated that *the reason of the individual* is, in your sense of the phrase, *the sole umpire in matters of faith*, so that the *decatalogue* itself shall be in danger of being no more respected by me than you say the *apostolic testimony* is. If, unsuspected by me, there be any such passage in my writings, I promise to expunge it with indignation, though it must be abundantly refuted by the general tenor of them.

To a charge of this serious nature, you must not, Sir, be silent. I demand a distinct and explicit answer. Your Letters would suggest many more questions, but as you are a young writer, and our correspondence may continue some time, I shall not proceed farther in this *catechism* at present.

It will be a matter of some curiosity, if you *should* find some difficulty in your reply, to see in what manner your brethren of the clergy will consider your conduct. There are some circumstances of this kind already before the public, which give no favourable idea of the spirit of some of your *corps* in this respect. Mr. Howes has been shewn to be guilty of a manifest *falsehood* in his account of my conduct in this controversy, and he has been repeatedly called upon to vindicate himself, or to ask pardon; but though he has been reduced to absolute silence, none of his brethren have expressed the least disapprobation of his conduct. It looks as if all sins of a *brother* were *venial* ones with you. Other clergymen have published pieces of *seurrility* against me of the lowest kind, consisting of nothing but the most absurd and intemperate railing, such as I have been ashamed in any manner to notice, and yet I have never heard that they were the worse received by their acquaintance,

acquaintance, superiors, or equals, on that account. Like Balthazar, who shot the Prince of Orange, I doubt not they have received *absolution* on account of their good intentions.

Others of the clergy, however, I well know, are ashamed of their conduct. With many of the clergy, both in the church of England and the church of Rome, I have long been in habits of intimacy, and I esteem their acquaintance and friendship an honour. So I do that of the liberal and intelligent of all persuasions; and I am far from confining all good sense to those who think as I do.

Wishing your future conduct may intitle you to class with such men as these, of whom your church is not worthy, I remain,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble servant,

J. PRIESTLEY.

Birmingham, Feb. 17, 1796.

P. S. Recollecting a general similarity between *your* account of my religious principles and that of Mr. Venn, I have, since the preceding Letters were sent to the press, looked into my reply to him, and I find the likeness more striking than I had imagined it to be. He says that I am *not a whit better than a rank Deist at the bottom*, that *my notions in religion are pagan*, that according to the *new schemers* in general (but evidently meaning myself in particular) the *faculty of man is of itself sufficient to determine what it becomes Jehovah to reveal of himself, his councils, and his way of saving his rebellious creatures*, that *we believe no divine teachings*, that *we disclaim the divine authority of the scriptures*, that *we insist upon a right to reject what we think to be unreasonable in them, be the words that affirm it ever so plain*.

This was advanced twenty one years ago, when I had published nothing in theology except my first *small catechism*, and the Tract on the *Lord's Supper*. However, as, according to Venn,

Venn, I was at that time advanced as far in irreligion as you represent me to be at present, I should think you might conclude, that notwithstanding your distressing apprehensions, the evil, whatever it be, will not proceed much farther.

After calling upon Mr. Venn, as I do upon *you*, to prove the several charges advanced against me, which I distinctly pointed out to him (though it was to no purpose; for like the man without the wedding garment, he remained *speechless* on the subject from that day to this) I said to him, as I do to you, 'I desire you, as a man, and a christian, to lay your hand upon your heart, and question yourself concerning the real temper of mind in which you wrote to me, the true motive of your conduct, and the end you had in view in endeavouring, as you have done, to expose me to the odium and indignation of mankind.'

As the *Reply to Mr. Venn* abundantly answered its purpose, I have no design to reprint it. But as the *Considerations on Differences of Opinion among Christians*, which I prefixed to it, may be as useful *now* as they were *then*, I shall subjoin them. This was the first piece of religious controversy that I wrote, and much as I have written since, I hope it will appear that I have never lost sight of the observations (equally proper for all who write or read controversy) which I then made.

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CONSIDERATIONS

O N

Differences of Opinion among Christians,

Originally prefixed to the Reply to Mr. Venn.

SECTION I.

Of latent Insincerity, and direct Prevarication.

HAVING, in my Letter to Mr. Venn, advanced as much as I think sufficient, by way of reply to his *Examination* of my treatise, I was not willing to omit this opportunity of addressing, to the public, a few general considerations, relating to *differences of opinion among christians*. If the nature and spirit of his pamphlet be considered, there are but few persons, I imagine, who will think an answer, addressed to him only, in the least necessary, or expected from me. Indeed, I never considered the answering of Mr. Venn as my principal object; but I thought it afforded me a fair occasion of exposing the gross misrepresentations, and unworthy cavilling, which not Mr. Venn only, but too many others, scruple not to make use of, in order to render those who differ from them, in some speculative points, odious to their fellow christians.

This is not a complaint of mine only, or confined to the present occasion. Numbers of the faithful servants of Christ have been greatly injured, and have had their usefulness impeded, by the same ungenerous and unjust treatment. It has been the case, more or less, in all ages; and I am sorry to see such a prospect of the continuance of it in time to come.

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How many worthy ministers of the gospel, who have taken great pains to understand christianity, and are seriously disposed to promote both the knowledge and the practice of it, to the utmost of their power, have their hands, as it were, tied up, by those who busy themselves in *spying out their christian liberty*. Many of them are so circumstanced, that, should they endeavour to serve the interests of christianity, and of mankind, in the way which they should think best adapted to answer the purpose; such a clamour, they cannot but foresee, would be raised, and so furious an opposition would immediately be made to them, that they are convinced they should do more harm than good by the attempt. There are but few whose advantageous situation, ability, and firmness of mind, concur to enable them successfully to encounter the difficulties they would hereby involve themselves in; so that, being incapacitated for doing all the good they are desirous of doing, they are content to do the little they can do, in as quiet and inoffensive a manner as possible; following the prudent advice of our Lord, who admonishes us, *not to cast our pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again, and rent us*.

That the interests of practical christianity should sustain so great a loss, is a thing truly to be lamented; and though, such is the state of things in this world, that these *offences will come*, and we are, therefore, to lay our account with meeting with them; we cannot help saying, with our Saviour, who foretold them, *Woe unto them by whom they come*; that is, to those who are the *criminal cause* of them.

Far am I from censuring those persons who are merely *mised*, or those who, in consequence of having been misled themselves, endeavour to mislead others. Every allowance should be made for all those who offend through *ignorance*, though they be carried away, even to the most violent acts of persecution, by a *zeal* that is merely *not according to knowledge*. But the woe of Christ will certainly fall with its whole weight upon those, who make a handle of the prejudices of mankind, to gratify their own pride, or promote their

their own worldly interests and ambition ; and who labour to inflame those prejudices with a view to making them subservient to such base purposes. Nor will those escape animadversion, who are, *in part* only, actuated by such unworthy motives ; and who, though they may think the cause they are engaged in a just and good one, yet prosecute it with more ardour and vehemence, than a pure regard to the goodness of it would have excited in them.

Very few of the actions of men have, I believe, one simple cause. We are generally influenced by a variety of motives in whatever we do. It, therefore, behoves us the more carefully to distinguish the influences to which we are subject, and under which we really act. God forbid that I should take upon me to condemn any individual of his creatures. Himself only knows our hearts, and he will render unto every man according to his works. But the general nature of our motives, the kind, or class, to which they are reducible, may in some measure, be known by the manner in which they operate. And the most distinct of all, in their nature and effects, are those which have the interest of *this world*, and those which have that of *another* for their object.

The man whose sole spring of action is a concern for *lost souls*, and a care to preserve the purity of that gospel, which alone teaches the most effectual method of their recovery from *the power of sin and Satan unto God*, will feel an ardour of mind, that will prompt him strenuously to oppose all those, whom he considers as obstructing his benevolent designs. An ardour of mind will likewise be felt by the man whose sole object is the advancement of his reputation, his party, or his fortune ; but this *ardour* cannot be supposed to operate in the very same manner in both cases, so as that they cannot be distinguished by an attentive observer. There will certainly be some difference in the choice of *means* to promote these several ends. We should naturally expect more fairness, more candour, more meekness, and more generosity, from the *christian*, than from the mere *man of this world*. The passions of the latter would, also, be apt to run into personal

personal animosity, envy, jealousy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmost zeal of the former would not only ever appear to be consistent with, but would be greatly productive of, the most disinterested benevolence, and the most affectionate brotherly love. By this rule we may, in some measure, *try the spirits whether they be of God*. But let the utmost diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that *we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ*.

When persons expressly avow the motives of their conduct, not to acquiesce in their declarations has the appearance of questioning their veracity; because it is taken for granted, that every man must know the principles of his own conduct. But the human mind is so complex a thing, that there is great room for self-deception; especially in cases where the passions and affections are strong, and when they occasion *similar emotions*, as well as produce *similar effects*. In this case a bystander may be a better judge than a man's self. A zeal for our *opinions*, and a zeal for our *party*, on the advancement of which our own personal reputation and influence depend, are necessarily connected, and reciprocally promote one another. For the same reason, a dislike of *opinions* has an affinity with the dislike of *those who hold them*, as men who are embarked in an interest opposite to ours, and whose credit and authority obstruct our own. Also, all the emotions of mind that are excited by the same objects, how different soever they be originally, by frequent association mix together, so that the parts of that *complex feeling* which results from their union, are no longer distinguishable. When two persons, who have had frequent intercourse, have been a long time at variance, and the subject of their contentions have been numerous; can either of them analyze the sudden emotion they will feel upon an unexpected meeting, and by which they may be instigated to some instant and violent act?

We often begin to act with one motive, but, as we proceed, we come insensibly within the influence of others; so that,

that, in some cases, the habit shall continue, though the original motive have no force at all ; and yet it may be impossible to say, in what part of this progress the influence of one motive ceased, and that of another began ; the change of character being insensible, and altogether imperceptible.

For my own part, I have no doubt, but that the leading men among the Methodists were influenced, originally, by none but the best of all motives, a generous concern for the souls of men. Nothing else, I think, can account for their conduct, as they were then circumstanced. But finding themselves, by degrees, at the head of a large body of people, and in the possession of considerable power and influence, they must not have been *men*, if they had not felt the natural love of power gratified in such a situation ; and they must have been *more than men*, if their subsequent conduct had not been, more or less, influenced by it ; and if they had not acted in many cases, just as the heads of any other party would have acted. I am far from meaning to insinuate by this, that their original motive is become extinct. I hope it is still the *leading* one with them ; but it becomes every man to distrust himself, and carefully to examine his own heart. Otherwise, as I believe may have been the case with many persecutors, we may begin with the love of God, or a regard to his glory, and end with the most diabolical dispositions.

These observations may throw some light on the seemingly different accounts that Paul gives of his own character and conduct, before he was converted to christianity. Before the chief priests and council of the Jews, he declared, Acts xxiii. 1. that *he had lived in all good conscience before God until that day*, and before Agrippa, Acts xxvi. 5, that *he thought with himself he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth* ; whereas, writing to Timothy, he says (1 Tim. i. 14, 15,) that *he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor, injurious, and the chief of sinners*, though, at the same time, he adds, *he had acted ignorantly, in unbelief.*

belief. They may also serve to illustrate the following passage in the prophet Jeremiah (and as the words are those of God himself, they ought to command a general and very serious attention; and more especially should they alarm every man, who imagines himself to be actuated by religious motives, when he is instigated to any act of violence against another; whether it be to the injury of his person, his fortune, his reputation, or his interest.) Jer. xvii. 9, 10. *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

The application of this doctrine may be made both by those who seem enraged at others, for holding opinions which they think damnable; and by those who insult and laugh at others, for opinions which they think to be merely ridiculous and absurd. In many cases, I am satisfied, that the pure *love of truth* is, on both sides, absorbed in passions of a very different nature. I could overlook every thing in a man, who, I thought, meant nothing but my everlasting welfare; or to inform me of any thing that I was ignorant of, and desirous of knowing; but those persons who have these pretences in their mouths only, when they are far from their hearts (though they may deceive themselves, as well as others) are by no means intitled to so favourable a reception.

It behoves us, however, carefully to distinguish between this *latent insincerity*, under the influence of which men deceive themselves, and that *direct prevarication*, with which those who are engaged in debate, are too ready to charge one another; as if their adversaries *knowingly* concealed, or opposed the truth. This is a crime of so heinous a nature, that I should be very unwilling to impute it to any person whatever. It is possible, indeed, that, in the heat of controversy, when the eyes of the public are upon a person, and he is afraid of appearing in a disadvantageous light, he may use a little sophistry, in order to seem to have the better of an

an argument ; but for a man voluntarily to undertake the defence of error, and knowingly to pervert the scriptures, in order to make them favour his purpose ; and especially to persist through life in avowing sentiments which he really believes to be false, argues the heart to be so void of all principle of rectitude ; it is such an insult upon the God of truth, and such a contempt of his judgments, that I think human nature could never become so depraved as to be capable of it ; and that no situation in human life could supply a sufficient temptation for such conduct.

If a man do but *suspect* that he is engaged in a cause that will not bear examination, he is naturally disposed to be silent ; or if, confiding in his skill in disputation, he should be tempted to challenge another to oppugn it, it would be in conversation only ; and it must manifest a degree of temerity, equal to madness, to proceed to *write* in such a case, when he could take no advantage either of his own presence of mind, or of the weakness and embarrassment of his adversary. There are such well known instances of the force of prejudice, that I had rather ascribe any opinion, how absurd soever, or any defence, how weak soever, in a man how sensible and intelligent soever, in other respects, to *wrong judgment*, than to a *bad heart*. I can hardly imagine any case, in which, exclusive of all consideration of candour and charity, the chance would not be in favour of the former.

If this remark be just, with what caution and tenderness should we censure any person, with respect to a point of mere *speculation*. To abuse any one because he does not see things so clearly as I may think I do myself, is cruel with respect to him, and has a much worse aspect with regard to God, who made us both, and who has placed us in our different situations for seeing, judging, and acting. How should I be affected at the great day of judgment, to be convinced of the integrity, and perhaps the right judgment, also, of an adversary, whom I should have treated in so illiberal and insulting a manner.

SECTION II.

Of the Source of Bigotry, and Persecution.

IT is unhappy, in some respects, that christians are divided into so many sects and parties. This circumstance, however, was certainly *foreseen*, and therefore wisely *permitted* by that great and good being who governs all things; and it will, I doubt not, notwithstanding several intermediate ill effects, contribute, at last, to the firmer establishment, and the greater efficacy of the christian scheme. In the mean time, let it be our joint care to obviate and lessen those necessary intermediate and temporary evils, which result from our differences of opinion.

Let every question in debate be proposed to the freest examination; and, without indecent passion, or personal animosity (which are equally a disgrace to us as men, or as christians) let us weigh the merits of every cause; and, without concealment or reserve, advance every thing that occurs to us in support of our respective opinions. If the *pure love of truth* influence us, we shall, in this way, much sooner find it. And, especially, being each of us conscious of the uprightness of our own intentions, let us not easily admit a doubt of the sincerity of others.

Let those who maintain that the mere holding of any *opinions* (without regard to the *motives* and *state of mind* through which men may have been led to form them) will necessarily exclude them from the favour of God, be particularly careful, with respect to the premises from which they draw so alarming a conclusion. Of all the tenets that can be the subject of debate, *this* has the most dreadful practical consequences. This belief lays such hold on the mind, and is apt to excite such a horror of the reprobated opinions, as, in the frail state of humanity, is with difficulty brought to be consistent with any esteem or love of the persons who hold

hold them ; and, from the *affinity of our passions*, it is, in too many minds, capable of degenerating into absolute hatred, rancour, and the diabolical spirit of persecution. Such persons are apt to be so transported with zeal, that they will even *do evil that good may come*, and destroy the bodies of some, to promote, as they fancy, the good of the souls of others. Indeed, no other opinions than such as these can, with the least plausibility, be alleged in favour of persecution ; and we find, in fact, that those have ever been the most violent persecutors, who have thought salvation and the favour of God appropriated to themselves. Where, therefore, such an opinion as this has unhappily been formed, we must guard ourselves against the effects of it, as we would against those of absolute insanity in the persons we conversed with ; and we should use every method we can think of to bring them from so fatal a turn of thinking, to a sober state of mind.

On the contrary, if we can be so happy as to believe, that there are no errors, but what men may be so circumstanced, as to be *innocently* betrayed into ; that any mistake of the head is very consistent with rectitude of heart ; and that all differences in modes of worship may be only the different methods, by which different men (who are equally *the offspring of God*) are endeavouring to honour and obey their common parent ; our differences of opinion would have no tendency to lessen our mutual love and esteem. In this state of mind, most of our differences would be in a fair way of being terminated ; and all that could remain would do no more than furnish an easy and agreeable exercise for the christian virtues of candour and moderation. Different parties in religion would then only afford room for a generous and friendly emulation, which of them should most advance the cause of truth, and recommend their several professions, by the most benevolent and exemplary conduct. Every man would speak or write with more or less warmth, in proportion to the apprehended importance of his subject ; but this could never be so great, as to afford the least colour or pretence for the violence of those, who imagine that

they are opposing *damnable heresies*; and could hardly ever betray them into any indecency or intemperance of language. Their anger would be most in danger of getting the better of their meekness and their pity, when they were attacked with the *pride* and *fury*, that is peculiar to those who fancy themselves to be the only favourites of heaven, and all the rest of the world to be reprobate from God and goodness.

Those persons who think that their salvation depends upon holding their present opinions, must necessarily entertain the greatest dread of *free inquiry*. They must think it to be a hazarding of their eternal welfare to listen to any arguments, or read any books, that savour of *heresy*. It must appear to them in the same light as listening to any other *temptation*, whereby they should be in danger of being seduced to their everlasting destruction. This temper of mind cannot but be a foundation for the most deplorable bigotry, obstinacy, and ignorance. Whereas those persons who have not that idea of the importance of their present sentiments, preserve a state of mind proper for the discussion of them. If they be wrong, as their minds are under no strong bias, they are within the reach of conviction, and thus are in the way to grow wiser and better as long as they live.

SECTION III.

Of the practical Tendency of different Systems of Doctrine.

MUCH has been said concerning the *practical tendency* of particular opinions in religion; but, in general, this has been done with little accuracy, whereas it is a subject that deserves the nicest attention of philosophers and divines; requiring an intimate knowledge of the human passions and affections, and of the various influences to which men are exposed in life. As to what Mr. Venn has thought

thought proper to call a *proof of the incomparable excellence of the orthodox system considered in a practical view*, I do not so much as pretend to examine it at all; and he or his friends may, if they please, consider this, as a confession, that I am not able to refute what he has advanced upon that subject. I shall only, in this place, suggest a few *general observations*; and may possibly, upon some other occasion, enter into a more particular discussion of this truly curious and useful subject of inquiry.

All that can be done to influence men's *moral conduct* is, in the first place, to present to their minds sufficient *motives of hope or fear*; and, in the next place, in order to make that course of actions, to which these motives lead, pleasing and easy, so as to form a *habit*, and engage the heart and affections; we must give them such ideas of the Divine Being, of their fellow creatures, of themselves, &c. (that is, of all the beings and things with whom they have any connection, and whom their duty respects) as will make them appear to be the proper objects of those dispositions and affections, which we are required to exercise towards them.

The great objects of hope and fear, which christianity presents to mankind, are the joys and torments of a *future life*. It is the conviction of the insufficiency and instability of every thing on this side the grave; it is a regard to a *treasure in heaven, which neither moth nor rust can corrupt, and which thieves cannot break through and steal*; it is the firm belief and expectation of the great *recompence of reward*, that awaits our perseverance in well-doing, at the *resurrection of the just*: these, I say, are the considerations that raise the hearts of men above this world, and place them beyond the influence of its pleasures or pains; so that they can neither be seduced by the one, nor deterred by the other, from *keeping the commandments of God*. These great and leading motives to virtue, these considerations, whereby we become habitually to look upon ourselves as *citizens of heaven, and only pilgrims and strangers on earth*, must be nearly the same in all the forms of the christian religion;
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and, in proportion to the degree in which we give our attention to them, and thereby strengthen our faith in them, they must influence us all alike.

All the difference, therefore, with respect to the practical influence of any particular opinions, can only be occasioned by the different views with which they present us, of those *persons* and *things* that are objects of our duty. I shall give a brief illustration of this in the idea that is exhibited of the Divine Being, according to what are generally called the *rational* and the *orthodox* systems.

According to all systems, God, our creator, preserver, and moral governor, is to be represented as the object of our reverence, our love, and our confidence; and this end seems to be completely effected by the *rational* christian, when he considers the Divine Being as having produced all creatures, with a view to make them happy, in a manner suited to their respective natures; bearing a most intense, and absolutely impartial, affection to all his offspring; providing for their regard to virtue (the only security of their happiness) by equal laws, guarded with awful sanctions; inflexibly punishing all wilful obstinate transgressors, but freely pardoning all offences that are sincerely repented of, and receiving into his love and mercy all who use their best endeavours to discharge the duty incumbent upon them; when we consider him as most minutely attentive to all the works of his hands, invisibly conducting all events with a view to the greatest happiness of all that love and obey him; secretly affording them all necessary assistance, in proportion to their real occasions, and abundantly and everlastingly rewarding, in a future life, their patient continuance in well-doing, during their abode in this state of trial and probation. How is it possible, made as we are, not to revere, love, and confide in such a being as this?

On the other hand, those who assume to themselves the distinguishing title of *orthodox*, consider the Supreme Being as having created all things *for his own glory*, and by no means for the general happiness of all his creatures; as imputing

putting to all mankind the transgression of their first parent, and dooming every man, woman, and infant, to everlasting and unutterable misery, for an offence to which they were no way accessary, of which it is impossible they should be, in any sense of the word, *guilty*; and for which it were absurd in them even to affect *repentance*. In this situation of things, when all mankind were incapable of doing any thing, in thought, word, or deed, but what tended to aggravate their condemnation; they suppose the universal parent arbitrarily to select out of the whole number a few, whom he designs for eternal happiness, leaving, that is, in fact, *decreeing*, all the rest to everlasting and unspeakable misery. According to them, also, even the elect cannot be saved, till the utmost effects of the divine wrath have been suffered for them by an innocent person. The grace that saves them is irresistible, and irrevocable, so that they can never lose the divine favour.

If it be possible to revere, love, or confide in such a being as this, I must own that I know nothing of the human heart, or its affections. Sure I am, that *a man* of this character, and who should act in this manner, would be the object of dread and abhorrence, to all who should be so unhappy as to be dependent upon him. What advantage favourable to virtue can be made of the *imitation* of such a being as this? Must an earthly parent be encouraged to love one of his children, and to hate another of them, independent of a regard to their moral conduct; and must he never forgive an offence in any of them, till a full satisfaction, or atonement, have been made to him for it?

It is the great boast of those who stile themselves *orthodox*, and particularly of Mr. Venn, that their sentiments have a great advantage in inculcating *humility*. But when, without that peculiar system, we consider ourselves as *the workmanship of God*; that all our powers, of body and of mind, are derived from him; that he is *the giver of every good and of every perfect gift*, and that without him we can do and enjoy nothing, how can we conceive ourselves to be

in a state of greater dependance, or obligation ? that is, what greater reason or foundation can there possibly be for the exercise of humility ? If I believe that I have a power to do the duty that God requires of me ; yet, as I also believe that that power is his gift, I must still say, *what have I that I have not received, and how then can I glory, as if I had not received it.* If the Divine Being have given me a *natural* power to move my arm, is not the obligation the same, as if he should, by a *supernatural* power, move it himself, whenever I have occasion for it ?

If, conscious of many imperfections, and many failures in the discharge of my known duty, I have recourse to the divine mercy and clemency, is not my gratitude and humility as great, when I conceive that I am indebted for the pardon of my sins to the *free, unmerited*, goodness of God ; as it could be, if I thought the pardon I received was *purchased*, by a full satisfaction made to his offended justice ? If the sense of gratitude and obligation, in this case, arise from my idea of the *freeness* of the gift, I think it must be greater upon the former supposition than upon the latter.

A sense of our obligation to our Lord Jesus Christ, also, as a person commissioned by God to *redeem*, that is, to *deliver, save, or rescue*, us from a state of sin and misery ; to give laws to mankind, to be Lord of all, and judge of the quick and dead, is as efficacious to attach us to him (as far as our regards to him are consistent with our primary regards to God his father ; who, out of his own love to mankind, sent him on this great and gracious errand) and to enforce obedience to his laws, as a sense of obligation that can arise from any particular hypothesis whatever.

Upon the whole, notwithstanding what Mr. Venn, and others boast, it does not seem to be a *fact*, that those who call themselves *orthodox* are at all more humble, and lowly minded, or more free from spiritual pride, and ostentation, than others. As far as my observation goes, I am satisfied, that the contrary is the case : nor from any knowledge that I have, or can procure, concerning these professors and their principles,

principles, do I think that there is the least reason to conclude, that (if we separate what belongs to the *form*, from what is peculiar to the *power* of religion) their scheme has any one proper advantage for religious and moral purposes. On the other hand, it seems to me to be, in many respects, unfavourable to the true spirit of christianity, or to that temper and disposition of mind which is peculiarly called *christian*; consisting, in a more especial manner, of the virtues of humility, meekness, mercy, and benevolence. It is unfavourable also to genuine piety, and indeed to every branch of vital practical religion. I think I could point out the cause of this, but it would lead me much farther than I propose to enter into this subject at present.

If I be asked why those persons who hold these opinions are not abandoned to all wickedness, when they evidently lay them under so little restraint, I answer, that this is often the case, with those who pursue these principles to their just and fatal consequences; for it is easy to prove, that the *Antinomian* is the only consistent *absolute Predestinarian*. But our wise creator has by no means left our moral conduct at the mercy of our opinions; and the regard to virtue that is kept up by those who maintain the doctrines above mentioned, is owing to the influence of some principles implanted in our frame; which, in many cases, will not suffer us to follow, or even to *perceive*, the immoral tendency of the most licentious opinions; so that, in general, they are only those who are previously depraved, that openly avail themselves of them. The consideration of this should make us both humble and thankful.

Besides, the opinions above recited are so contrary to natural reason, and the general tenor of the scriptures, that *better sentiments* are continually obtruding themselves upon the mind; and these are the principles that, *really*, though *secretly*, influence the conduct of those who are truly pious and virtuous among Calvinists; and by no means the principles which they openly profess, when they are questioned about them: and it is happy that they do not distinctly perceive the

the inconsistency there is between their principles and their conduct. We are, also, so formed, that we naturally turn our chief attention to the most favourable aspect of our sentiments, as well as of every thing else belonging to us; so that we seldom attend to what is very shocking, and has a bad tendency in them.

It confirms this observation, that many of the more moderate Calvinists, as I am informed, and the greater part of the Methodists, seldom insist upon the doctrines of *absolute election and reprobation*, especially in their public discourses. This must be owing to their being secretly dissatisfied with them, to some latent suspicion, or confused kind of feeling, that they are not to be depended upon; at least that they are not fit to be the subjects of frequent meditation with the bulk of mankind, and that they are in great danger of being abused. Mr. Venn himself, though he makes a great parade of, I believe, every other branch of what he calls *orthodoxy*, in his answer to my treatise, is quite silent on this head. If his good sense be really staggered at these doctrines, a little more thinking will give him reason to entertain suspicions of the rest: for the whole system is closely connected, and the doctrine of *unconditional election*, together with that of the subjection of the whole human race to the everlasting wrath of God, on account of *original sin*, are the chief corner stones of the whole building. Take away these, and the whole *complex*, but *compact* fabric, falls to the ground.

Difficult as it is to account for the virtue of those who call themselves *orthodox* on the principles mentioned above, they are such as themselves must necessarily allow: for they consider our sentiments as exceedingly licentious; and yet (whatever Mr. Venn may do) I know there are among them, who cannot help acknowledging, that there are genuine marks of unfeigned piety and goodness among those whom they call *new schemers*. To account for this fact, therefore, they must have recourse to the influence of principles that are not explicitly avowed by us, just as I do with respect to them.

SECTION IV.

Of the Causes of Difference of Opinion, and the Reading of the Scriptures recommended.

I CANNOT help wishing that persons of all sects and parties would study their *bibles* more, and *books of controversy* less. But all persons have their *favourite authors*, to which they too much confine themselves, even to the neglect of those *authorities*, from their agreement with which all their merit is acknowledged to be derived. Were it not for this circumstance, it would be absolutely impossible that the individuals of mankind, whose intellects are so much alike, should differ so widely in their religious sentiments as they now do; at least that they should lay so great a stress on the points in which they differ.

Since the understandings of men are similar to one another (at least so much, as that no person can seriously maintain that *two and two make five*) did they actually read only *the same books*, and had they no previous knowledge to mislead them, they could not but draw the same general conclusions from the same expressions. But one man having formed an hypothesis from reading the scriptures, another, who follows him, studies that hypothesis, and refines upon it, and another again refines upon him; till, in time, the *scriptures themselves* are little read by any of them; and are never looked into but with minds prepossessed with the notions of others concerning them. At the same time, several other *original readers* and thinkers, having formed as many other hypotheses, each of them a little different from all the rest, and all of them being improved upon by a succession of partisans, each of whom contributes to widen the difference; at last no religions whatever, the most distinct originally, are more different from one another, than the various forms of *one* and the same religion.

To remedy this inconvenience, we must go back to first principles. We must begin again, each of us carefully studying

studying the scriptures for ourselves, without the help of commentators, comparing one part with another. And when our minds shall, by this means, have been exposed, for a sufficient time, to the same influences, we shall come to think and feel in the same manner. At least, all christians, being sensible that they have, in many, and in the chief respects, *one Lord, one faith, one baptism*, they will keep *the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace*.

In reading books of controversy, the particular texts, from which favourite opinions are chiefly inferred, are kept continually in view, while others are kept out of sight; so that the person who confines himself to the perusal of them, necessarily forms a very wrong notion of the *general tenor* of the scriptures, and lays a disproportionate stress on particular opinions. He never looks into the scriptures, but it is with a state of mind that leads him to expect to find his opinions either clearly expressed, or plainly referred to, in every chapter. Now, it is well known, that all strong expectations tend to satisfy themselves. Men easily persuade themselves that they actually see, what they have absolutely depended upon seeing.

Were it possible for a number of persons to make but an essay towards complying with this advice, by confining themselves, for the compass of a single year, to the daily reading of the scriptures only, without any other religious books whatever; I am persuaded that, notwithstanding their previous differences, they would think much better of one another than they had done before. They would all have, more nearly, the same general ideas of the contents of scripture; and of the chief articles of christian faith and duty. By reading the whole themselves, they could hardly avoid receiving the deepest impressions of the certainty, and importance of the great and *leading principles*, those which they would find the most frequently and earnestly inculcated; and their *particular opinions*, having come less frequently in view, would be less obstinately retained. It was in this manner, I can truly say, that I formed the most distinguishing of my opinions in religion.

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I do not say that this practice would have the same effect with all persons. I have no hopes of its succeeding with those who are advanced in life. I would not even recommend it to them; since the consequence of unhinging their minds, though by a conversion from error to truth, might possibly do them more harm than good. Nor have I **have** much hope of those who are hackneyed in controversy, and to whom the methods of attack and defence, peculiar to any system, are become familiar. But I would earnestly recommend this method of studying the scriptures to young persons, before their common sense and natural feelings have been perverted; and while they are capable of understanding the obvious meaning of a plain expression.

In this case I cannot help thinking, that, notwithstanding the seeming force of the texts that are continually in the mouths of those who call themselves *orthodox*; and notwithstanding our present translation of the bible, which (being made by men who were fully persuaded of the truth of that system) is, in many places, much too favourable to it; yet that both the general *tenor of the whole* (which, with a person who reads the scriptures much, cannot but have far greater weight than any particular texts whatever) and also that numbers of *emphatical single passages*, would effectually over-rule any tendency to that which is commonly called orthodoxy.

To mention a single instance. Would not a constant attention to the general strain in which Moses, all the ancient prophets, John the Baptist, our Saviour, and the apostles, address sinners, wear out, in time, every trace of the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation? The language in which the Divine Being is uniformly represented in speaking, is, *As I live, saith the Lord, I would not the death of a sinner, but had rather that he would repent and live. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, oh house of Israel.* What a solemn, and cruel mocking of mankind would this be, if the Divine Being, at the same time that he made this declaration, was purposed that many, if not the greatest part of them, should not repent, but die without mercy?

SECTION V.

General Advices.

LET all the different sects and parties of christians attend with candour to the opinions and practices of others, and freely adopt whatever they are convinced is good in any of them. There is no sect or party but hath something belonging to it of an *adventitious* nature, and that is no necessary part of the general system; and let not our party prejudices blind us so far, as to make us condemn and reject what is good in any set of men, merely because they hold it; but be the system ever so bad, let us glean from it every good idea, and every useful custom. Were all parties faithfully to attend to this, the very worst of them would be made tolerable, and they would all soon be brought nearer to one another in affection and mutual charity, if not in opinion also.

Let us all accustom ourselves to the consideration of having *one proper head*, and make less use of other names, by way of party distinction. We are to call no man *father*, or *master*, upon earth; for we have *one father, even God*; and *one master, even Christ*. The use that is made by many of the authority of *the Reformers*, and others, appears to me to be an infringement of this injunction. The use of the names of men tends much more to enflame a party spirit, than any other method of distinguishing one another. Besides, by frequently calling one another *Arians*, *Socinians*, *Calvinists*, &c. we are too apt to forget that all these are only different denominations of *christians*; and in order to raise an odium against their adversaries, many scruple not in so many words, to say they are *no christians*. Now had men kept to the distinction of *opinions* only, I cannot conceive how any man could ever have been called a *deist*, or an *infidel*, who professed to believe the divine mission of Christ.

Christ. But the terms Arians, Socinians, &c. easily pass into that of *no christians*. This, however, is a most base, and disingenuous proceeding; and those persons might, with the same propriety, call their adversaries Mahometans.

In all our disputes about different tenets, and modes of the christian religion, let us be careful not to lose sight of the *great end and design of christianity* in general, viz. that Christ came to *bless mankind, in turning them away from their iniquities; to redeem (or deliver) us from all iniquity, and to purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*. The chief thing, therefore, that we should attend to, and the only rule for estimating the importance of any opinions, is their efficacy for this moral purpose. Let us, then, not suffer ourselves to be deceived by mere words, and *pompous sounds*. As to those who follow other rules of estimating the importance of opinions, and who think that *mere belief* can be of any avail to recommend them to the favour of God; they ought, as I observed before, to have very good reasons for their persuasion. For, if once the above mentioned plain and obvious rule be quitted, it will not be easy to find another that can be applied to any good purpose. After losing this clue, men will be involved in an endless labyrinth. They will often cry *peace, peace, to themselves, when there is no peace*; and they will, also, often *fear, where no fear is*.

I have nothing more to recommend to the different sects and parties of christians, but to remember that we are all *men*; and to be aware of the force of prejudice, to which, as such, we are all liable. If we be not strangely infatuated indeed, we shall be sensible, that there have been great and good men of all parties. Ridley and Latimer were men who entertained very different opinions, with respect to the points which are now denominated *orthodox*; yet they were both burned at the same stake, and suffered martyrdom with equal constancy. This consideration alone, if sufficiently attended to, cannot fail, I should think, to stagger the faith of those, who believe the favour of God to be confined to any

any one party, especially if they be naturally men of modesty and candour. As *men*, however, we are certainly all of us fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence. Let us, therefore, as becomes reasonable beings, in these circumstances, be careful to keep our minds always open to conviction; let us cultivate humility, and a diffidence of ourselves, and earnestly apply to *the God of truth*, that *we may be led into all truth*.

What effect these considerations may have upon my readers is very uncertain. It is not improbable, but they may inflame the animosity of some against the author and his friends; but on others, it may be hoped, they will have a different and more favourable influence. If they be of any use to make any persons *think* and *reflect*, and *search the scriptures* more than they have hitherto done, it is all that I desire; having no doubt, but that the result will be favourable to what I think to be the cause of truth and virtue. Whether we preach or write, we are properly compared to those who *sow seed*; and *this* it is our duty to take every proper opportunity of doing, though we know not whether it will be productive. Eccl. xi. 6. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper*. For though *Paul* may plant, and *Apollos* water, it is *God* that gives the increase; that is, the success depends upon the operation of causes, and the influence of circumstances, which, though they be unknown to us, are under the direction of that great Being, who, in his infinite wisdom, disposes of us and of all things. *May his will be done, and to him be glory, through Jesus Christ*. Amen.

